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420.
PRICE ONE SHILLING.

Nathan Barlow.

SKETCHES IN THE RETIRED LIFE OF
A LANCASHIRE BUTCHER.

In Verse.

BY

AUSTIN DOHERTY.

ENTERED AT STATIONERS' HALL.

JOHN HEYWOOD,
DEANS_GATE AND RIDGEFIELD, MANCHESTER;
AND 11, PATERNOSTER BUILDINGS,
LONDON.
1884.

NATHAN BARLOW.

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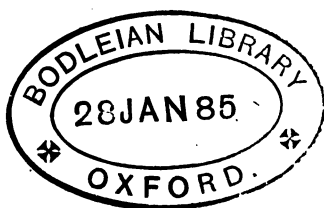
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I.—THE PROJECT.

THE "cuts" were sold, the rougher pieces put
In brine for keeping, and the shop was shut ;
The buxom daughter Jane, with active zeal,
Had cleared the table of the evening meal,
Drawn down the blinds and lit the gas—'twas dusk—
Upon her bosom pinned a sprig of musk,
Slipped through the shop, where, at the half-shut door,
She flirted with the son of neighbour Moore ;
The son went out to tend the horse and dog,
And Nathan Barlow mixed his evening grog.
The butcher's face, now with repletion flushed,
Betrayed a smile as he the sugar crushed,
As if some thought, while trifling with his spoon,
Was taking shape, and would be uttered soon.
His portly dame, who read the moral law,
Sat facing Nathan, and these symptoms saw.
Now Nathan, seeing eagerness intense,
Was wont to thwart it and begin to fence ;

So, taught by failures past, she did not try
To force his speech by questions, blunt or sly,
But, with assumed indifference, waited till
His words should from his working thoughts distil,
And drop into her ears refined and hot,
For thus the essence of his mind she got.

“Aw’m thinkin’, Harriet, now,” at length he said,
“’At as our Sam’el’s likely soon t’ be wed,
An’ as they’ll want a whoam, an’ th’ whoam a prop,
It wouldno be amiss to give ’em th’ shop.
We’n warked for moore nor thirty ’ear, my lass,
An’ saved i’ th’ time a stiffish lump o’ brass,
An’ when we’n gan him th’ shop, an’ thowt o’ Jane,
There’ll plenty still for thee an’ me remain.
Aw’m not so good i’ woint nor keen o’ seet,
Nor hafe so leet an’ sprightly o’ my feet,
As what aw have bin, wench. An’ th’ same by thee ;
Theau’rt not so leetsome as theau used to be.
Theau’s gather’d flesh ’at fills a bigger gown ;
When dinner’s o’er theau likes to lay thee down ;
Theau sits at back o’ th’ counter takkin’ pay,
Bu’ ca’s for someb’dy else when owt’s to weigh ;
Theau spakes o’ fulness both i’ th’ yed an’ feet,
An’ cannot do wi’ sittin’ up at neet.
We’re yet i’ th’ middlin’ way ; bur if we stop
I’ th’ smook an’ crowd o’ th’ town, an’ stick to th’ shop,
We’s sink an’ sink, an’ goo fro’ bad to wur,
Just th’ same as plants ’at hannot gradely air.
But th’ breeze o’ th’ fielts, an’ th’ smell o’ th’ herbs, an’ ease,
Met set us up like shiftin’ sickly trees.

We'll goo to th' country, lass, afore we're killed ;
Aw'll buy a bit o' freehowld land, an' build.
We'll have a place for t' entertain our frien's,
An' keep a cow an' pig, an' tothree hens."
Then, peering o'er his specs with furtive eye,
He added gravely, but with twinkle sly,
"Aw'll tak' a pew i' th' church, an' buy a grave,
An' try t' remember aw've a sowl to save."

"It's time you did," the butcher's wife replied.
"You have a soul—to save or lose," she sighed.
"Your past offences, Nathan, dear, are great ;
I've rarely known you strictly just in weight."

"When Sam an' Jane were youngsters, and theau said
They needed physic when they went to bed,
Theau sweeten'd th' powders out o' th' traycle pot,
An' geet 'em down bout ownin' what they'd got.
Now, folk 'at's owd han just as sweet a tooth
For language as for traycle i' their youth,
An' moral physic for a mind 'at's gross
Gooes down far asier if yo flavour th' dose.
When trade were slack, my lass, an' prices low,
We'd hard work t' live an' pay us road an' o',
Theau sees, if aw'd bin givin' bumpin' weight,
Aw'd ne'er ha' kep' my books an' payments straight.
Aw've allus heerd, on th' strength o' th' parson's word,
'At what we give to th' poor we lend to th' Lord ;
An' if one wants a loan i' th' need he sends,
An' taks fro' th' poor, it mun be th' Lord 'at lends.
An' so, theau sees, my wench, aw've done no worse
Nor just that bargain wi' the Lord reverse.

Aw've borrowed nowt aw didno need, aw'm sure,
An' now aw'm ready t' pay both Lord an' th' poor."

"Ah, but with prices high, and business good,
You stinted weight as often as you could."

"Ay, becos th' better th' shop were med to pay,
A' th' moore i' th' end there'd be for t' give away.
Alms covers multitudes o' sins, it's said,
An' theau's bin givin' sin we'n bin i' th' trade ;
An' as we're wed, an' one i' flesh—(dost see?)
What theau gan, aw gan, just as mich as thee.
How mich aw've gan mysel' aw couldno tell,
Bu' th' poor's had mony a bit aw couldno sell."

"Ah, Nathan ! you have been too worldly wise ;
To holier wisdom you will never rise.
They that give only what they cannot use,
And call that charity, the term abuse."

"Why, lass, for t' carry that theer raysonin' out,
A mon mun give his dinner, an' goo bout ;
Bur aw'm for no sich nonsense, an' aw'm sure
Theau'd ne'er do nowt o' t' sort thyself—that's moore.
Theau likes thy dinner waarm, i' th' reg'lar way,
An' th' scraps 'at's left theau gives another day.
Wi' folk 'at's strugglin', lass, it's nobbut sense,
I' coverin' sin, to try an' save expense.
Economy's a virtue, so they say,
An' every virtue owt to have it day ;
An' them 'at's frugal while they th' meean's earn
Con then afford t' gi' charity it turn.
Th' one virtue links to th' other, like a chain ;
Bu' th' poor an' wasteful allus poor remain.

When out o' th' shop, aw'm often tow'd, my lass,
'At aw'm a sort 'at's middlin' free wi' brass.
P'r'aps, if aw gan as much as aw should like,
Theau'd ha' t' goo short, an' then theau'd happen skrike."

"But," said the dame, "in honesty we must,
Before we can be generous, be just;
And man's first obligation in this life
Is to provide for family and wife."

"Well, so aw've done. Theau's allus had thy crust,
So how it went, wench, generous or just.
Theau'rt gentler bred, an' better tow't nor me,
Bur aw con tell what's what as well as thee.
Theau'd t' wark instead o' talk when fust we're wed,
Bu' folk will prate moore when their brass is med.
Praich when we get i' th' country, then aw'll hear;
Aw'st ha' moore time for lis'nin' when we're theer.
Aw'll goo to-morrow t' seek a bit o' land—
Aw think to Notsmur, as it's cloose at hand—
An' when we'n built, an' liven cheek by jowl,
Aw'll settle down an' try to save my soul.
Theau says aw've bin a sinner, an' it's true;
Bu' p'r'aps there's bin as big, an' bigger too.
Aw'm tow'd 'at big an' black uns as repents
May elbow for'ard till they sit wi' th' saints.
Aw've likewise heerd it said there's greater joy
'Mung th' saints an' angels 'at inhabit th' sky
O'er one 'at's strayed an' wandered comin' back
Nor ninety-nine 'at's kep' i' th' gradely track;
An' if that's true, an' health an' strenth aw'm given,
Aw'll mend my ways, an' cheer 'em up i' heaven."



II.—TURNING THE FIRST SOD.



HE site was chosen, the conveyance made,
The architect selected, lawyer paid,
And, keeping cheapness always in his view,
Nathan determined upon building two.
If for one house he could obtain a rent
Upon the cost of only six per cent—
And this he thought was certain, if not more—
He should, he argued, have his own at four.
And so the plans were drawn, approved, and passed,
And, tenders in, the job was "let" at last.

The butcher, self-denyingly inclined,
To others all the honours had resigned.
To lay the first brick was his daughter's lot,
His son's to fix the final chimney pot ;
But, ere was raised a trowel or a hod,
His wife, he vowed, should turn the primal sod.

The time arrived, the dame, all smiles and smart,
Was helped by Sam and Jane into the cart ;
Then Nathan, dressed in drab, with new white hat,
And in whose buttonhole a moss rose sat,

Sprang to his seat like one who help disdains,
And, whip in hand, at once assumed the reins.
The chestnut mare, though old, still fat and strong,
Erected head and ears, and jogged along.
The day was bright and cloudless, and their way,
Some six miles westward of the city lay,
And motion, counter to a gentle breeze,
Sufficed the heat of August's sun to ease.
A roadside inn its tempting sign displayed
When over half the distance had been made.
Here Nathan drew his rein, and, getting out,
Refreshed himself with half a pint of stout,
Then, lighting first his pipe and tendering pay,
Resumed his seat, and then resumed his way.

Now fairly left behind the murky town,
A rich green foliage, tinged with autumn brown,
Of trees that high above the hedges towered,
The travellers' way in partial shade embowered.
On either hand, along the spreading plain,
Like sun-gilt water waved the ripening grain,
Or, fairer far than gold on velvet green,
The bundled corn in row-ranged stooks was seen.
Afar the landscape died in woods, and higher,
Above the skyline, stretched the lofty spire,
While intervening verdure—every shade—
The scene by contrasts more delightful made.

Plagued by the flies about her twitching ears,
The old mare tossed her head and shook her gears,
As still at easy, jog-trot pace she sped ;
And, turning to his wife, the butcher said :

"It's asier breathin', Harriet, here a deal
Nor what it is i' th' city, lass. Aw feel
As aw should think met feel a fish, 'at's been
I' dirty wayter, when it gets i' clean.
O' city life aw've gotten fairly sick ;
Both th' air an' th' runnin' wayter's far too thick.
Aw'm fond enough o' ale wi' body in,
Bur air an' wayter, le' me have 'em thin.
We'st be i' th' house by th' early spring, an' when
We're settled theer we'st live as lung again.
At th' bottom, yon, there's th' finger-post and th' schoo',
An' wheer we're gooin's just atop o' th' broo.
Hi ! Maggie, lass !" cried Nathan, jerking rein
And cracking whip, which made the old mare strain
Her utmost nerve, and scour, with flowing tail,
Along the road as if she bore the mail.

"Down hill, theau sees, hoo feels no drag on th' trace
Fro' th' weight behind, an' gooes a spanking pace.
It's when hoo has t' goo up a broo hoo fails ;
When th' collar starts o' pooin', then hoo snails.
Poor Maggie's owd, an', like a mon 'at's lushed,
Hoo ma'es a deal moore progress when hoo's pushed."

A pace that puts Mag's mettle to the proof,
A cloud of floating dust from tire and hoof,
A lazy walk up hill for half a mile,
Which sundry jokes at Maggie's cost beguile,
A crack, a flourish, and a last short spin,
And Nathan's mare has gained the village inn.
The pulling up attracts the ostler's ears,
Who on the pavement, touching cap, appears,

Catches the reins and knots them, takes the whip,
Helps down the dame, and calculates his "tip ;"
Then, with directions well the mare to guard,
He takes her head and leads her to the yard.

Into the inn, upon refreshment bent,
His better half behind him, Nathan went,
And, meeting there, in robe of satin dressed,
The portly hostess, thus his wants expressed :

"A pint o' stout ; an', see yo', my owd gel
Waants somewheer t' goo to tittivate hersel'.
Hoo's gooin' t' turn a sod, and when it's o'er—
By five o'clock, or p'r'aps a bit afore—
We'st waant a private room, and cup o' tay,
Wi' owt yo'n got at's out o' th' common way.
No mate—nor eggs an' bacon winnot do ;
Aw'm sick o' fleshmate an' o' bacon too.
Some salmon steaks 'ud suit us best of owt,
Or roasted duck, or tothree soles or trout—
Yo'n gotten a' ? Well, then, there's no suspense ;
Let's have 'em a', an' hangment tak' th' expense."

Led by a chambermaid, the dame withdrew,
But, smoothed and tidied, soon returned to view ;
Then, with a pleased, bright smile upon her face,
Her husband took her to the meeting place.
There, strung from pegs, along the turfy ground,
The outline of their future home they found,
And there contractor, architect, and men
Gave three loud cheers, and louder cheers again.
Not far behind them, with a foaming can,
Came from the inn a stalwart serving man ;

And when the liquor had been passed about,
And "health and fortune" drunk with many a shout,
The foreman navvy brought a polished spade,
Which ready to the matron's hand he laid.
Against the sod, which was already cut,
She put the spade, and on the spade her foot,
And forced it underneath ; then, stooping lower,
She raised the sod and deftly turned it o'er.
When, panting to regain her wind, she paused,
Such were the plaudits that her efforts caused,
That, though o'erfaced, she wondered in her heart
How she could e'er have doubted she was smart.
Yet, with embarrassed look and burning cheek,
She turned as if seclusion she would seek,
And Nathan, seeing it troubled her to stay,
Now led his blown and blushing wife away.

He gave *carte blanche*, the navvies to regale,
For pickles, bread and cheese, and "sixes" ale ;
The architect and the contractor he
Invited with himself and wife to tea.
With eager appetite the meal begun,
But slackened into gossip ere 'twas done ;
And when 'twas cleared, and came the social glass,
The joke and anecdote began to pass.
Never doth night so slyly on us steal.
As when amusements her approach conceal ;
And when to see the time his watch he sought,
The butcher swore 'twas later than he thought,
Called for the ostler, ordered out the cart,
And bade the dame get ready for the start.

Soon are the cart and Maggie at the door,
Soon o'er a parting glass is paid the score,
Soon for his "tip" the ostler thanks repeats,
And soon are dame and Nathan in their seats.

Nearer and nearer the horizon drew
The setting sun, and long the shadows grew ;
Rich were the clouds in colour, light the wind,
When Nathan left—the big, red sun behind.
The mare now briskly trots or canters o'er
The slope that slowly she had walked before ;
And now she walks as gently as she may
The hill she gallop'd earlier in the day.
Here was the road o'erarched with leafy shade,
Wherethrough the mellowed fire of sunset played ;
Here had the farmer's laden wagon been,
For hanging hay on bush and branch was seen ;
Here, at the sidegate leading to the lane,
The rustic damsel toyed with rustic swain ;
Here with the cowboy, watchful for his word,
The docile collie guarded home the herd ;
Here, as the mare pulled lazily along,
Was heard the redbreast's plaintive autumn song.

When Maggie felt her feet on level ground,
And knew her head was free, and homeward bound,
She broke into a gallop smart that showed
Her heels to younger horses on the road.
But lost were all the splendours of the sun,
His gorgeous tints had waned to shadows dun,
And night her mantle o'er the city spread,
Ere Nathan to her stall his old mare led.



III.—THE BUILDING.



WHEN Nathan Barlow saw before his eyes
The walls of his new home begin to rise,
He felt himself to be a man of more
Importance than he ever was before.
At least three times in every week he went
To see the growing fruits of what he spent ;
And, having walked observantly about,
And aught he wanted changing pointed out,
It was his wont a distance to withdraw,
And choose a point of view whence best he saw
The sketch he paid his architect to make
In bricks and mortar form and substance take.
Here, with his head cocked and his feet apart,
Pride in his face and pleasure in his heart,
He gently rocked himself on heels and toes,
And mused, as absently he stroked his nose,
How things with him had for the better grown
Since he was stable boy to Farmer Brown.
The men, alert at all times for a treat,
Were quick to see and flatter this conceit.

'Twas "Mester Barlow" this, and "Mester" that,
Accented by such touches of the hat,
Such marvel how could he, who seemed so strong,
Be yet the age he was and look so young,
Such pleasing prophesies of future health,
Such slyly-hinted envy of his wealth,
That Nathan felt as if he younger were,
And proud, almost, as if a millionaire ;
And for a time, more affluent to appear,
He added tots of "short" to rounds of beer.
But new sensations, charm us how they may,
Soon cease to please us if they do not pay,
And Nathan's golden rule, o'er trade or glass,
Had always been, "Get vally for thy brass."
The sun, which, cloudless, will repel the gaze,
May yet be looked at through the wintry haze,
And sometimes, scanned when thus subdued his sheen,
Behind his deadened brightness spots are seen.
So for a time was Nathan dazed by smiles,
And fuss and flattery—sprat-for-salmon wiles ;
But when their value by their cost he tried,
Through his mistrust into their aims he pried,
And, peering through the shining surface thin,
Beneath the pleasant smirk he saw the grin.
While drinking at his charge, they swore the cost
Should ne'er to such a generous soul be lost ;
If any change of plans he had in view,
To mention it was all he had to do.
But Nathan found, as many more will find,
That pothouse promises are naught but wind,

And, like the froth that foams o'er liquor new,
Before the ale is dead are lost to view.
Favour, though cheap as dirt where glasses ring,
Is "on the job" a somewhat costly thing;
There on obliging chiefly men enlarge,
But here the question's mainly extra charge.
He stopped the "lowance," supervised the work,
And when 'twas slighted blustered like a Turk,
Declared he would not have his houses marred,
And over every "extra" haggled hard.
So, when they found that Nathan Barlow's fist
From day to day closed tighter on the grist,
The smirk and joke gave place to growl and curse,
Though in their hearts they thought of him no worse.

At length, the job being finished, paid the fees,
Old Nathan took possession of his keys;
And, as he turned them, thankfully he sighed:
"Praise be to God! aw've gotten t' thieves outside."
With many a wince, and eke with many a smile,
The butcher slowly overhauled his file,
And much and many patient pains he took
To check by bills the entries in his book;
And having ascertained the total cost,
And sighed o'er what through easiness he'd lost,—
He pondered deeply, to decision came,
Then scratched his head and thus addressed his dame:
"Aw've geet 'em out at last, wench, an', by th' mass,
If e'er aw spend a hawp'ny moore o' brass
I' brick-an'-mortar stuff afore it's built,
Aw'll suffer like a fatted cawf t' be kilt.

' An honest mon's the noblest work o' God '—
So th' poet says—bu' dostno think it's odd
He's med so few o' th' sort, an' 'thoose he's med
By th' most o' folk are reckon'd soft i' th' yead ?
Aw've seed sich wark, aw'm fain to think it's true,
As th' actor said, 'at ' honesty's a foo'.' ”

“ It is not so, dear Nathan ; honour must
Entwine itself and grow about the just,
As clings unto the oak the mistletoe,
Constant through winter's nakedness and snow
As in the summer's wealth, and easier seen
In poverty than plenty, ever green.”

“ Aw like thy illustration middlin' well,
Bu' th' way theau puts it doesno' seem to tell.
That mistletoe, wench, nobbut clings to th' tree
For th' rayson th' leeches like to stick to me—
To suck me an' to live on me, an' fast,
If letten, wench, they'd leave me bare to th' blast.
Well, well, my lass, theau needno strain thy e'en ;
Aw'll own at times aw'm p'r'aps a bit too keen.
They say there's good an' bad i' every line ;
There happen is ; aw know there is i' mine.
If God's med any honest builders, though,
There seems a deal o' mystery wheer they go.
It seems to me they'n gotten lost or strayed,
For aw've ne'er come across one yet i' th' trade.
They'n happen bin bowt up, like th' china ware
'At's scrambled for becos it's owd an' rare.
Aw think it mun be so, for if aw see 'em,
It's likely t' be as mummies i' th' museum.

Sin' aw jack'd th' contract up, an' paid mysel',
They'n bin like devils letten loose fro' hell.
There's howdfasts, nails, an' screws, if aw've bowt one,
Aw'll lay my life aw've welly bowt a ton ;
That plasterer's had as mony bags o' hair
As met ha' plastered six i'stead o' th' pair.
It isno pounds they'n done me on, bu' scores ;
That joiner bit me gradely wi' them doors ;
They're hung on hinges med to tak three screws,
An' th' dirty wastrel's nobbut put in twos.
An' as for mowldin'—nay, theau needno smile—
If he's had inches, he's had mony a mile.
Some stales your timber, some your lead, or lime ;
But th' plumber licks 'em a' at fudgin' time.
He'll put his pot on th' fire to melt his lead,
An' let it stop till th' handle's welly red ;
An' then he'll snatch it off—too hot to howd—
An' let it stand to cool it—till it's cowl ;
An' then he'll put it on again, an' when
He's look'd o'er th' papper, taks it off again ;
An' then he'll potter wi' it on to th' roof,
Bu' what he does theer nob'dy has no proof,
An' th' gaffer doesno care how lung he stays,
As lung's he charges th' time an' somb'dy pays.
Theau's talk'd a deal o' th' bit aw've chet i' weight,
An' praiched about th' transgression bein' great,
Bur if aw'd know'd as mich as now afore,
While th' chance were theer, lass, aw'd ha' chetted more.
If th' bit aw did mysel my conscience pricks,
What aw've bin done on i' my gizzard sticks,

An' th' weight of a' my trespass upo' th' law
Feels asier nor my losses i' my craw.
Now th' on'y grain o' comfort aw con land
Is t' think at th' start aw'd had a bit i' hand."

"To say that others have done wrong to you
Is no excuse for any wrong you do.

No doubt these men are very much to blame,
But, as they're gone, forget them," said the dame.

"Enjoy your house, and think not of the cost ;
You've plenty left, whatever bit you've lost."

"There's sense i' that, owd wench, an' so aw'll try ;
O'er milk 'at's spilt it's little use to cry.
Our Sam mun write a note to Mester Scholes,
An' tell him t' send o'er tothery ton o' coals.
We'll have 'em aired, an' let 'em stand a bit,
An' when they're fit for gooin' in we'll flit."





IV.—THE FLIT.

NONE that have long lived in one house alone
Can count from memory all the things they own,
And if their full possessions they would prove,
The surest way to do it is to move.
Things that have long, by all forgotten, lain
In secret places, come to light again ;
And things with histories, when unsought they rise,
May lift to laughter or depress to sighs.
Here is a valentine whose ancient joke,
Revealed anew, can yet a smile provoke ;
That silver trinket, lost when Nancy left,
At length absolves that injured girl from theft ;
In that old bag of marbles Nathan sees
His boyhood's toeless boots and tattered knees ;
That noseless gingham, countless years unviewed,
Tells of the night when first he came home "slewed."

The day appointed came ; the day was fine,
And men and van were at the door by nine.
Then Nathan, bustling up with shirtsleeves rolled,
Began to order, fuss about, and scold,

And, rendering no one help of any kind,
At length lost both his temper and his wind ;
And when his better half advised a walk,
" Lest haply he should tire himself with talk,"
He swore that yet she'd need his help that day,
And hastened to the " public " o'er the way.
There, with a pipe and glass, himself he stowed
Where he could look across and watch them load,
And now and then, with furtive sign and wink,
He lured the vanmen from their work to drink.

The dame's design was, in the butcher's cart,
Before the van, with certain things to start,
That when the men arrived at Notsmur she
Might be prepared at once to give them tea ;
So Sam and Jane began the cart to load,
While she for Nathan peered along the road.

He sees his son with pans and kettle come,
His daughter with a coalbox and a broom ;
Next come a fender, fireirons, and rake,
A basket stocked with butter, loaves, and steak,
A tea caddy, two canisters of tin,
A bottle with his favourite cordial in ;
And last, with vexed face, to the cart there trots
The dame herself behind a heap of pots.

Now all was ready for the start, and she
Was wondering with impatience where was he ;
And as she, pouting, each way scanned the street,
He slowly rose from his observant seat.
He watched a while, and scratched his nose and head,
And presently, soliloquising, said :

“Hoo snubb’d my help when aw were willin’ t’ strive,
An’ now, by th’ mass, hoo’s wantin’ me to drive ;
Bu’ sin’ hoo wouldno ha’ me when hoo could,
Aw’ll tak good care hoo shannot now hoo would.”

With this resolve, on satisfaction bent,
He left the public-house and homeward went.
The dame’s vexed look, when Nathan met her eyes,
Was changed into a flash of pleased surprise,
But soon his surly air again did chase
The look of satisfaction from her face.

“If t’cnot drive,” he said, “get who theau can ;
Theau’ll not ha’ me ; aw mean to goo wi’ th’ van.
Dost think aw’ve no moore sperrit nor a louse ?”
This said, the butcher stalked into the house.

Now, drink on tempers ruffled by a tiff,
Like starch on collars, tends to make them stiff,
And heads and buttonholes excess has marred
Will both become unmanageably hard.
This knew the dame, who held her scolding in
Till she with better purpose might begin.
The day was young, and there was much to do,
And he could hinder, if not work, she knew.
In this dilemma left, she ordered Jane
To don her hat and cloak and take the rein ;
And so they went, predicting on the way,
From *his* condition, but a weary day.

They did the run with Maggie in an hour,
Without mischance beyond a passing shower,
And, if the carter’s reckoning were true,
The van should take but little over two.

Soon in the grate a cheerful fire was made,
Soon on a plank were cups and saucers laid,
Soon through the house a genial warmth there crept,
And soon the floors, already scoured, were swept ;
Then, when a while they'd gossip'd over tea,
'The van was due, for it was half-past three.
The dame grew fidgety, began to pout,
And, Jane behind her, to the gate went out,
But, all being silent as the grave, 'twas clear
The van and Nathan yet were nowhere near.
Deep tracks of humours ill in wrinkles showed
Upon her face, like wheelruts in the road,
For she divined, from this ill-timed delay,
There had been halts and drinking on the way.
The twentieth time she sent her daughter Jane
To look from round the corner down the lane ;
But soon the girl returned, in words to tell
The tale her listless movements told too well.
'Twas almost five, and useless standing there ;
So, with the sad composure of despair,
They went within, resigned to sit on bricks,
With no relief but grumbling, up to six,
When, if they came not, they resolved to start
In search of them with Maggie and the cart.

There let them rest. Meantime, admit we must
The dame's conjectures no more sad than just.
When he was "primed," 'twas Nathan's wont to pass
No licensed house without another glass,
And vanmen, frail as ordinary flesh,
Are prone to yield when challenged to refresh.

It is not hard for men whose labours tire
To suffer rest that loses not their hire ;
Indeed, once seated free of charge to sup,
Fatigue of ease will rarely get them up.
This Nathan knew, though fresh himself, and so
He, first to stop, was likewise first to go.

Now go we back into the cheerless room
Where sit the women, wrapped in sulky gloom.
“Hark ! what was that ?” Upon their ears there steals
A heavy rumbling sound of distant wheels.
“Is that the van ?” Not uselessly to move,
They listen keenly first, the hope to prove.
The rumble nears, and voices loud and shrill
Are heard, as urging horses up a hill.
Now sound the whip, the cobble-jolted wheels,
The falling lash some luckless horsehide feels,
The clash of chains, the snort of cattle blown,
The clank of heavy hoof-irons on the stone ;
Now suddenly these blended sounds increase,
Now, with a lurch, as suddenly they cease.
Here to the gate the wearied women ran,
Whence, stuck in mire, they saw the laggard van.
Turned from the paved road on to yielding mud,
Checked by a sunken wheel, the horses stood,
With streaming nostrils, wet and smoking hides,
Wild eyes, frothed lips, and palpitating sides.
And there stood Nathan too, his hat awry,
And dress disordered. Catching Harriet’s eye,
And seeing on her face an anxious frown,
He faced about and tried to stare her down ;

And as he stood, defiantly displayed,
Beneath his heavy head his body swayed.

Once more the whip the half-breathed horses feel,
The carters put their shoulders to the wheel,
And men and cattle all their forces strain
Until the front of Nathan's house they gain.

As Sam was having new things home that day
To take the place of what were brought away,
The dame, aware that he had need of Jane,
Detained the cart and sent her home by train.

Now, when the carters had unbarred the van,
And to unload it of the goods began,
A portly matron with a garden stool
Approached, and, with deliberation cool—
Her seat arranging as prepared to sit
And see the furniture—began to knit.
Still nimbly knitting, as the goods went by,
She scrutinised them with a critic's eye.

"Who's yon?" at length said Nathan to his dame,
Who was, though silent, wondering the same.
First at his wife he glanced with scowl severe,
Then at the knitting gossip sitting near.

"Shut up that van, yo chaps," at length he said,
His face with indignation waxing red.
"Fetch th' round snap table and that aisy cheer,
An' then come in and have a drink o' beer.
Let cheeky folk as come wi' stools to toot
Sit theer an' stare till th' stools han takken root.
It's not so nice by dayleet t' see a show,
An' them as connot wait had better go ;

Bur if they choosen t' sit th' performance through,
We'll give 'em time to study th' outside view."

The chair and table in, he slammed the door,
And thought of stool or gossip little more.
He with the men sat down to smoke and drink,
And Harriet, head on hand, to wait and think.
Familiarly he "thee'd" and "thou'd" the men,
And cheekily they "thee'd" and "thou'd" again,
And when he found them fast and forward grow,
He bade them angrily their place to know.
He thumped the table roughly and he swore,
And toss'd the table and its contents o'er.

"Ger on wi' th' wark!" he roared, now off his seat;
"Yo lazy hounds! yo'll not unload to-neet."

The drunken vanmen struggled to their feet,
In surly silence staggered to the street,
And, thinking of the distance home, began
In haste and earnest to unload the van.
'Twas nearly midnight ere their work was done,
And traces sad they left behind when gone.
On all the damage Harriet stared aghast,
But thanked the Lord the day was o'er at last.
Too weary now to fix, and sorely crossed,
The bedding (heap-like in a corner tossed)
Upon a mattress on the floor she spread,
And got her husband, breeches on, to bed.

Now, when beside him stretched, and no one near,
She pours her long-pent troubles in his ear;
His day's misdeeds she one by one recalls,
Depicts the panels smashed and battered walls,

The lamp and glassware broken, garments rent,
The filthy floors, time wasted, money spent,
And, reckoning first the woeful bill of cost,
Bemoans—her crowning grief—the rest she's lost.

“If t' waants a rest, wench, stop thy carryin' on ;
Just howd thy prate, an' get it while theau con ;
Aw'm 'fresh' to-neet, theau sees, an' connot threep,
An' theau'll be fresh i' th' mornin' if theau'll sleep.”

Still chid she on as if she'd chide till dawn,
Though soon her only answer was a yawn ;
But when the yawn had passed into a snore
She saw 'twas useless talking any more ;
And so she turned, and so she drowsy grew,
And soon beside him she lay snoring too.





V.—SETTLED.

“**S**OMETIMES, my wench, a start 'at's bad 'll tend,
By taichin' caution, to'art a better end. '
Repentant Nathan argued thus his case,
When smoothing to his wife his late disgrace.

“Nay, cautious wisdom,” Harriet said, “foresees
What leads to evil, and the danger flees.
He that must stumble ere he sees a stone
Is hardly wise enough to walk alone.”

“There's none so skilt to do as never t' fail,
An' none so strong bu' what at times they're frail.
That fuddle over th' flittin', lass, theau'll see,
Is likely t' prove a rale good thing for me.
It's like enough, now, on'y for that theer,
Aw met ha' started some day fuddlin' here ;
Bu' now these country alehouses aw'st shun,
And theerby (dostno see?) no risks aw'st run.
A dog 'at's had a puncin' shies at clogs,
An' awk'ard blunders ma'es men cute as dogs.
We'n gotten cellars fit for t' stillage ale ;
Aw'll order two hafe-barrels, mild an' pale,

An' when they're th' hafe way through, or bit afore,
Aw'll tak' an' order two hafe-barrels more,
To give 'em time, afore they're tapped, to settle,
An' then aw'st allus ha' my ale i' fettle.
Aw'st want a jar o' Dunville, too, for punch,
A drop o' brandy for a nip at lunch,
An' some o' th' owd Scotch whisky Parker's sowd,
'At sups so nice an' mild wi' th' wayter cowl.
Aw've oft bin longin' t' try th' owd Scotch again,
It rifts so full i' th' throat o' th' taste o' th' grain.
Aw'll get th' stuff in at once, an' when it's here
Aw needno' goo for owt to sup elsewheer.
Now dostno think that fuddle happen'd well ? ”
But Harriet, smiling, answered, “ Time will tell.”

His butlery arrangements duly made,
The damage to the house repaired and paid,
Supplied such new things as the dame required,
And 'gainst strange cats the cellar windows wired—
When she, in fact, thought all inside “ would do,”
Then Nathan thought about the outside too.
He bought a pick and fork, a rake and spade,
And tastefully with plants his garden laid ;
He built of wire and wood work, for the hens,
Behind the house, both roost and hatching pens ;
He gave his son the cart, and bought a gig,
A saddle for his mare, a cow, and pig ;
He let his other house at goodly rent,
And seemed with all about him well content.

Then Nathan sallied forth to look around,
And many a pleasant nook and path he found.

He rose betimes, on Nature's face to gaze,
And each new day grew warmer in her praise.
He roamed in silent meads no throng disturbs,
And culled for keeping healing household herbs ;
He sought for primrose sweet and pansy wild,
And bore them home delighted as a child.
He loved to hear the sparrows through the leaves,
The youngling chepstows creaking in the eaves,
The cuckoo's hollow note at eve or morn,
The harsh voice of the crake among the corn,
Or, swelling from some tall tree's topmost spray,
The throstle's loud and sweetly varied lay.
At early morn he watched the skylark rise,
And, full in song, go bounding to the skies,
Till 'gainst the cloudlets that the morning deck
The dwindling bird diminished to a speck—
A speck so small that with a wink 'twas lost
As hopelessly as adamant in frost.

But, much as Nathan loved good air and views,
His appetite was quite as keen for news,
Which, while the lanes and byways he explored,
He sought from all he met, and duly stored.
Soon the extent of every farm he knew,
The value of the land, and produce too ;
He learned who farmed their own, who held on rent,
Who hoarded gains, and who on follies spent.
He never missed a chance of walking through
An empty dwelling or a building new,
And thus ere long the butcher understood
What property was "jerry," what was good.

'Twas known that he had money to invest,
And soon for loans or mortgage he was pressed ;
But, far too shrewd incautiously to lend,
He first required them details full to send.
Thus much he learned known only to the few,
And with his neighbours' means familiar grew ;
And thus it chanced—for he could bargain well—
Some safe, sound mortgages to Nathan fell.

When nothing more about his home was strange,
He saddled Maggie, wider fields to range
By mansion bold, to fence-girt grounds confined,
By farm and cot, the rural roadways wind,
To spots where dwellings thinly scattered, nigh
Some place of worship and a tavern, lie ;
Where traffic seems so rare along the ways
That on the stranger natives gaping gaze ;
Where leaves lie thick the rugged kerbs below,
And tufts of herbage 'twixt the boulders grow ;
Yet where are promised—on the signs, at least—
“Accommodation good for man and beast.”
Now, men who ride at times their nags must bait,
And mostly order something while they wait ;
And Nathan Barlow, out on horseback seen,
Was not the man to be accounted mean.
When stopped to give his mare the mealy draught
She loved so well, and with such relish quaffed,
Was he not, too, entitled well to share
The favour of refreshment with the mare ?
Of course ; and he—it always came to pass—
While Maggie got her bucket, got his glass.

Thus, ere the summer closed, on every side,
Within the compass of a half-day's ride,
Of every tavern Nathan could have told
The signs, the landlords, and the stuff they sold.
He tried them all, and knew, both far and near,
The houses famed for well-conditioned beer,
Whose spirits neat no weakening water bore,
And whose, when served, might stand a trifle more.
Nor had he yet incurred one greeting sour,
Returning home at too untimely hour ;
For, howsoever distant he might ride,
He drank his "nightcap" at his own fireside.





VI.—“FRIENDS.”

THE Barlows, after walking to the station
With “friends” who called without an invitation,
Sat down to chat before they went to bed,
When Mistress Barlow to her husband said :
“ You really, Nathan, must increase my purse,
Or I contrive less money to disburse.
So many visitors take so much stuff,
I find my household fund is scarce enough.
That salmon—see, they’ve only left the tail—
Was just nine pounds six ounces in the scale.
That’s twelve and six, at sixteenpence, you know,
And scarce a bit of picking left to show !
I really thought that Jones and Mrs. Brough—
’The greedy things !—would never have enough.
And then my tarts, that should have served the week—
All gone ! In town they hardly used to speak !
And of the five, I question much if any
Have ever spent in trade with us a penny.”

“Not one,” said Nathan, “not as aw’m aware.
When fost they come aw couldno help bu’ stare ;
Bur as theau med sich fuss, an’ seem’t to press,
Aw thowt, theau knows, ’at aw could do no less.
Bur if they’n played owd boots wi’ thy good cheer,
They’n not neglected me i’ th’ shape o’ beer.
They’n put a good stiff hafe a dozen jugs
O’ Tetley’s bitter i’ their ugly mugs ;
An’ th’ women folk, as well as th’ chaps, can tot
That Dunville’s Irish whisky when it’s hot.”

“Besides, it’s not expense alone, but trouble ;
It really makes my labours almost double !
And then it’s always Sunday people come,
When one enjoys a quiet nap at home.
I’m sure a body almost might as well
Be hostess of a moderate-sized hotel,
As be like me, kept running to and fro,
To wait on people that we hardly know.”

“It’s chep when folk con run to th’ country air
An’ sponge their vittles on a fipp’ny-fare.
They’n had a rare blow out at little cost ;
Bur if theau’s sense, it happen wain’t be lost.
One likes for t’ give a welcome to a frien’—
Not every day, theau knows, bu’ now an’ then ;
An’ thoose as ma’es us welcome when they see us,
Why, let ’em come as often as they pleease.
Bu’ thoose as nobbut come t’ see what we han,
An’s ready t’ catch an’ grab at o’ they can,
Like th’ hens, ’at’s allus lookin’ what’s t’ be get,
Thoouse need no better nor thy hens be tret.

Thee give 'em nowt as theau con ate thyself,
 Or tell 'em plump they'n baggins at th' hotel.
 For what theau gi'es 'em t' ate thy hens'll lay,
 Bu' feedin' loafers no road winnot pay.
 Theau shouldno ax sich folk to sit by th' fire,
 Bu' stop i' th' parlour talkin' till they tire.
 They'll soon 'make tracks,' theau'll see, as th' Yankees say,
 If nowt 'at's chep i' th' atin' line's i' th' way."

"That's just what would have pleased me best to do,
 Had I not feared thereby displeasing you ;
 For when you built your house, among your ends
 You named a wish to entertain your friends."

"No friends of eaus, i' th' country or fro' th' town,
 Shall want a crust, or glass to wesh it down ;
 Bu' friendship's not a thing as howds a place
 I' every breast 'as keeps a smirkin' face ;
 Sam's naphtha lamp, as bruns so oreet, he thinks,
 Gets o' it leet, theau knows, fro' stuff 'at stinks,
 An' needs a cautious hand. No, oft enough
 It's fun' wi' faytures coarse and manners rough ;
 Bu', like th' owd bottles cobweb'd o'er i' th' bin,
 They'n stuff as waarms an' comforts th' heart within.
 Wi' friends, like gewgaws, simple folk are fool'd ;
 There's moore o' both 'at's Brummagem nor goold.
 They looken weel, mayhap, i' th' distance eyed,
 Bu' dunnot weather th' testin' when they're tried.
 A mon 'at's showed hissels a friend to me,
 So what his luck, a friend'll allus be ;
 An' if he fa's, an' help i' rayson begs,
 Aw'st lend a hand to set him on his legs.

Bu' them as once a lead i' fortin tuk,
An' favver'd not to know me i' their luck,
Need ne'er no moore to know owd Nathan try,
An' if they tumble they'll ha' leave to lie."

"And so they ought," the irate dame replied.
"Those Broughs used scarce to know me in their pride.
I thought their profits surely must be great,
They kept such style—I almost might say state ;
But if they were, I've reason since their call
To think their savings must have been but small.
If you remember, Nathan, after tea,
She came into the kitchen after me,
Of looming trouble told a doleful tale,
And asked me if I thought you would be bail."

"And what did t' say ?" asked Nathan, waxing hot.

"I said that I was certain you would not."

"No, not for hafe-a-crown, the cheeky hounds !"

"And then she asked to borrow thirty pounds."

"An' what o' that ?" he angrily inquired.

"I said I could not do what she desired ;
With sums so large my functions did not deal,
And she had better to yourself appeal."

"Hoo doesno need, unless hoo thinks we're geese.
Aw'll lend 'em nowt, wench—not a hawp'ny piece."

"Indeed I would not, Nathan, for I'm sure
It's little less than sinful if they're poor."

"A chap wi' brass, an' not o'erdone wi' brains,
Con allus count a deal moore friends nor gains ;
For if he doesno find one friend indeed,
He'll ne'er be short o' twenty friends in need ;

Bu' let him watch, or th' friends in need'll swell
Till he'll be left i' th' need o' friends hissel.
It allus were an' will be, same as now—
Th' industrious mon con feed an' fettle th' cow,
Con rince his crocks an' furbish up his can,
An' when he's gotten th' milk, con let it stan' ;
Bu' when wi' time he's browt his cream to th' brim,
Then th' lazy folk'll want to come an' skim.





VII.—CHRISTMAS EVE : UNSETTLED.

WITHIN, the hearth from blazing fire aglow ;
Without, the roads and meadows white with
snow ;

The trees and hedgerows, crystallised with frost,
Disclosed new beauty for the verdure lost.

In fur-lined slippers and a round felt hat,
At breakfast with his dame the butcher sat.
A tender steak, cut thick, and off the rump ;
Of sweet new butter, an inviting lump ;
A rack of toast, well browned, and newly made,
And just one egg apiece, that morning laid ;
Fine-flavoured coffee, creamed, and smoking hot,
And pale French brandy, good as could be got—
On these the trade-worn couple broke their fast,
And, eating at their ease, were full at last.
Then Nathan, with his specs upon his nose,
And on the fender bright his slippered toes,
Lolled back, with pipe and morning paper too,
And first, from habit, looked the markets through.

Anon, while he was reading to the dame,
A burst of music o'er the orchard came,
And instinct told him that the village band,
In gorgeous uniform, was close at hand.
He dropped his paper, to the window strode,
Whence he could see the bandsmen on the road,
With cheeks like bladders blown, before the inn,
Dispensing less of harmony than din.
Then from the tavern presently came out,
With glass and brimming jug, a maiden stout,
Whose giggling gestures, as she served the drinks,
The smirking bandsmen met with chucks and winks.

As out upon this picture Nathan peeps,
The holiday sensation o'er him creeps.
The band moves on, and he resumes his chair,
But finds the sitting most uneasy there.
An impulse irresistible to move
Unsettles him in the domestic groove.
Where he shall go, as yet he cannot say,
But *there* it is impossible to stay.

The wintry sun now struggled through the haze,
And shot into the room a few bright rays,
While Nathan o'er his wife's face brought a frown
By stating that he meant to go to town.
To see the markets in their Christmas dress
He felt a wish not easy to repress ;
"An' if," he said, "aw tak th' twelve twenty train,
Aw'st just ha' time to dine wi' Sam an' Jane ;
An' when aw've seen how th' markets look to-day,
Aw'll come by th' five o'clock, i' time for tay."

Ere Nathan finished Harriet's frown had cleared,
And resignation in her face appeared.
She brought his boots, assisted with his coat,
And fixed his muffler snugly round his throat.
"Be careful, now," she said, "of taking cold ;
And give the children love a hundred-fold ;"
Then in his pocket thrust, with laughing strife,
A baby's skip to give to Samuel's wife.
He took his leave, his hat, and walking cane,
And towards the station sauntered down the lane.

Now Nathan's purpose was not well defined,
But like a leaf astray before the wind,
Or like a straw upon a stream that purls,
Which every little stone or eddy whirls.
O'er towards the inn a longing look he cast,
And veered his course to make a circuit past ;
For, strong as was the impulse home to quit,
The disposition grew again to sit.

Before a shop all gay with sweets and toys,
The butcher was beset by girls and boys,
Who clamoured round him, and, with childish jokes,
Tried hard from him a Christmas box to coax ;
And presently, cajoled to give the treat,
He took them in and made their joy complete.
When all the rest were served, his eyes inclined
Unto one long and raw-boned lad behind,
From whose wide eyes a dwarfish hope looked out,
As peeping 'twixt the legs of giant doubt ;
Ashamed to be so big, he feared a trick,
And deemed a gift less likely than a kick.

Now, Nathan eyed him o'er from head to toes—
The pendant lip, lank cheeks, and dirty nose ;
The sleeves and breeches short and tight, wherethrough
He thrust his bony limbs too far to view ;
The anxious look that his distrust betrayed—
Observant Nathan all these signs surveyed.

“Suppose theau'd tuppence, lad ; neaw, what would t'buy?
A jack-i'th-box, a pictur', or—” “A poy,”
Exclaimed the lad. “Aw'll bet thee,” Nathan cried ;
“Sich like as thee crom o' they con inside.
No toy's so pratty, toffy hafe so sweet,
To growin' lads, as leathery crust an' meat.
Nowt's tough enough i' thy ribs long to lie.
Here, missus, gi' this hungry lad a pie.”

He clutched the pie and bolted ; in his mind
Still lurked the terror of a foot behind ;
But, once at distance safe, the frightened boy
Sat down upon a step to eat his “poy.”

While laughing at the lad's ungrounded fear,
A group of thirsty labourers, standing near,
Approached, with smirking faces, Nathan's side,
And wished in turn a merry Christmastide ;
Then one, becoming spokesman for the rest,
First touched his hat, then Nathan thus addressed :

“Yo'n med yon childer happy wi' your trates ;
Do th' same by us, good mester, me an' th' mates.
To sich as yo a bob'll ne'er be lost
On four poor chaps 'at's out o' wark wi' th' frost.
We'n tramped about till we're both dry an' cowed,
An' two on us, yo see, are gerrin' owd.

A sup o' ale 'ud waarm us. If yo please,
For th' love o' God, sir, stand a pint apiece."

It tickled Nathan as a notion odd
To link the love of beer with love of God ;
He fancied fuller churches if the two,
In practice, could be blended in the pew.
But to the inn he took them on their plea,
And stood them, not a pint apiece, but three ;
And there he sat and gossipp'd o'er his drains
Till after dark, regardless of the trains.
Anon he heard a distant engine scream,
And then a train into the station steam,
And, looking at his watch, seemed vexed to learn
It was the train by which he should return.
Now when, at length, the butcher left his seat,
He did not feel quite steady on his feet,
But wended homeward, thinking on the way
How best to act, and what were best to say.

At home the dame had everything prepared—
His house coat and his fur-lined slippers aired,
His favourite teacakes on the fender hot,
And tea just brewed, with "cosy" on the pot.
She heard the train, and had not long to wait
Before the latch clicked in the garden gate ;
And when she hastened wide the door to throw,
She found him at the threshold, flecked with snow.

His face was serious entering the door,
And through his nose he breathed with semi-snore ;
His hat and muffler—holding by the wall—
He hung upon the hatstand in the hall ;

By jambs and tables guided, as if lame,
With cautious steps into the room he came,
And, grasping first the cushioned arms with care,
Let down his person gently in his chair.
He coughed, and wheezed, and made his windpipes squeak,
And tapped his chest as if afraid to speak.
“A drop—ugh, ugh !—o’ punch—ugh, ugh ! Be quick !”
She ran to mix it, fearing he was sick.

He sipped the glass of punch before him laid,
Put down the glass, and then he sighed, and said :

“By gum, theau’s med that punch some hot an’ strong !
It waarms my chest an’ favvers t’ thaw my tongue.”
Then, rattling like a marble round a can,
His loosened tongue with such a clatter ran,
That well the dame might falter to believe
A cause so slight could such effects achieve.
His glass, she saw, was yet half full or more ;
He, therefore, must have had some drink before ;
And observation led her to conclude
That ’twas not sick her husband was, but “screwed.”

He talked of those he’d seen in town and train,
And brought their mother love from Sam and Jane.
“Sam’s wife’s no use,” he said, “i’ yonder shop,
Though hoo were kind i’ pressin’ me to stop ;
An’ as for th’ markets, fro’ what aw could see,
They’re not a patch o’ what they used to be.”

“Now, Nathan, are you sure you’ve been to town ?”
She asked, with searching look and fretful frown.

“I don’t believe you have ; indeed I fear,
Instead of going, you’ve been drinking here.”

"Thee put that silly notion fro' thy yead.
There's nowt wo'th suppin' here, as oft aw've said ;
An' wheer there's dacent stuff, there's some excuse
If now an' then one gets a bit on th' loose.
Beside, aw couldno, bout aw'd bin, ha' tow'd
'At Sam were well, bu' Jane had got a cowl."

"No more you could, with truth, nor if you'd been,
For Jane is well, as I myself have seen.
While you, it seems, have been upon 'the loose,'
She came from town and took away a goose ;
And, proving that Sam's wife you have not met,
That baby's skip is in your pocket yet."

This Nathan heard with something of dismay,
But soon, with look defiant, turned to bay :

"Dost think aw've come for t' be a hermit here,
An' t' live o' male an' milk fro' year to year ?
Mon ne'er were med awhoam to hide hissel',
Same as a periwinkle in it shell,
'At wants a pin or needle t' fotch it out ;
He's sociable, an' meant to knock about.
Thee stop thy meddlin' ; theau'll i' futur' find
Aw'st drink just wheer an' just when aw've a mind.
Aw've tasted ale 'at's thin an' ale 'at's thick,
An' ale 'at's hard, an' ale 'at's up to Dick ;
Aw've tasted ale 'at's owd, an' ale on th' fret,
An' ale 'at's soured wi' thunder, bur aw'll bet
Th' wo'st ever brewed's moore relished wheer there's life
Nor th' best October wi' a grumblin' wife."



VIII.—THE VILLAGE INN.

AS bees buzz round, in summer's genial hours,
To taste the sweets of many distant flowers,
So Nathan rambled, halting there and here,

To taste and test varieties of beer.

But bees, how far soever they may roam,

When laden, always fly direct for home ;

While Nathan, loaded, even though 'twere late,

Could seldom make his homeward journey straight.

As long as he could walk and talk at all,

A new-met crony meant another call.

At length, grown tired of wandering, and perhaps

Taught needful cautiousness by past mishaps,

His favour settled on the local inn

(Despite its ales were thick and spirits thin),

For here were cheerful chat and laughter loud,

And deference to his means that made him proud.

A gaudy-painted sign once swung before

An old brick tavern Notsmur had of yore—

An angel red, inside two golden rings,

On disc of blue displayed her golden wings.

While horses drank without of water clear,
Within their drivers drank of dusky beer.
Now from the gaze has long since passed away
The wide, deep ingle of that earlier day ;
Gone is the raftered ceiling, all too low
For bear-skinned Guardsman there erect to go ;
Gone are the tables, stools, and benches plain,
And gone the guests, no more to come again.

But where erewhile that small red angel hung,
The modern inn—a greater Angel—sprung ;
And though no more her gilded wings she spread,
“The Angel” on the signboard still was *read*.
Its frontage tall, its windows bayed and bold,
Of inside chambers large and lofty told ;
And England’s red-cross ensign flaunted high
From roof-reared flagpole pointing to the sky.
By daylight seen, its stuccoed front was bright,
And brilliant was its coloured lamp at night.

Inside were rooms designed each taste to please,
Their furnishings proportioned to their fees.
In front the parlour, rich in red and gold,
With crystal pendants, gilded cornice mould,
White marble tables, mirror wide and tall,
And sporting pictures hung on every wall.
Here easy souls, on seats of softest plush,
Were prone to loll in laughter o’er their lush.
Upstairs the “swell,” expert with ball and cue,
Might “cush” and “cannon” on a table new ;
While in the “tap” the drudge of spade and cart
Could drink his “fours” and sport with puff and dart.

Behind the house the outdoor sportsman found
The skittle alley and the quoiting ground,
And, girt with poplars, well-mown, rolled, and clean—
Delight of middle age!—the bowling green.
Here ancient fogies, bald, obese, and grey,
As easy exercise, were wont to play,
And, with contortions and grimaces, tried
To better aim their wandering “woods” to guide.
Around the borders sheltered seats were laid,
Where loungers sipped in view of them that played.
A summer bar was built beside the gate,
Where, frilled and ribboned, pretty Susan sate,
And served the wines, the spirits, and the beer,
Dispensing smiles provoking with her cheer.

To all these pleasures, as the fit might please,
The butcher’s ample pockets held the keys.
In every game distinction Nathan sought,
And somewhat dearly his experience bought;
But perseverance, watchfulness, and will,
At length, with better fortune, brought him skill.
At billiards soon he played a goodly break,
In quoits or skittles well his part could take,
And soon he vied with all the bowling “cracks”
In choosing ground for creeping towards the jacks.

One greater honour had the Angel yet
To soothe the souls that after glory fret;
For there, its ranks by local gentry swelled,
A grand Freemasons’ lodge was monthly held.
When Nathan saw them to their meetings come,
Ascend the staircase to the large front room,

And heard the laughter and the plaudits loud,
To ascertain what all this meant he vowed.
Nor was it long ere Nathan's chance arrived.
One day, the Masons lunching, he contrived
To be within the billiard room at play,
Which on the same flat as the Masons lay ;
And when, the luncheon o'er, he heard the pots,
And waiters pass the word for "colds" and "hots,"
Along the landing Nathan then advanced,
And thence upon those merry Masons glanced.
Outside he saw the remnants of the lunch,
Within the warden pipes and steaming punch,
The jovial brethren donned in all their best,
With gems and silken sashes on each breast,
And thought contented he could never be
Till he became one of those Masons Free.
The cherished hope was gratified at last ;
Proposed, he was supported well, and passed ;
The entrance charges, near ten pounds, were paid,
And Nathan Barlow was a Mason made.
Nor did the Mason newly fledged intend
To show less fine than "them o' th' better end,"
But lavishly proceeded to invest
In jewelled signs to glitter on his breast.
These and his robes he bought a case to fit,
Which, when complete, he called his "Mason's kit."
He soon found friends, for he was never slow
To help a brother if in water low.
There—for he missed no lodge nights—he would sit,
And air his own or laugh at others' wit,

Supremely pleased, besashed and badged, to pass
The evening with his brethren o'er his glass ;
And Nathan's glory culminated here
When once he sat at table with a Peer.
But sometimes, as occasion served, he'd slip
Down to the bar to snatch a furtive " nip,"
For 'twas his pride, as 'twere by stealth, to show
His grand insignia to folks below.
At such times faces from the taproom gazed,
Where forms in slops and moleskin stood amazed,
The marvel great in their dilated eyes
As if the moon had fallen from the skies.
But through their wonder Nathan could descry
The intimation plain that they were dry,
And, though affecting naught to see or hear,
He mostly sent them in a can of beer.

But Nathan's easiest, happiest moments, far,
Were spent among his cronies in the bar.
A special seat to him was here assigned,
Which all preoccupants at once resigned ;
In this, when present, he was always seen—
A cosy corner seat beside a screen.
When at his lodge, his humour coarse and quaint
Was somewhat curbed by decorous restraint ;
Respectful awe imposed a cautious care
When what he termed the gentlefolks were there.
But here, in Frolic's undenied domain,
He gave his whims and merriment the rein,
At pop and parsons ever ripe to rail,
And vaunt as life's chief blessing, nut-brown ale.



IX.—RURAL VARIETY.

ONE day when Nathan, somewhat touched with
“blues,”

Sat down with solemn countenance to muse,
His chin on knuckles, elbows upon thighs,
And fixed intently on the fire his eyes,
The dame, who missed no penitential mood,
First sighing, thus addressed him for his good :

“Nathan, with every comfort in your home,
Around you pleasant scenes wherein to roam,
A church sequestered where ’tis peace to pray,
And pastor kind to point the heavenward way—
With blessings such as these your mind to win
From scenes of coarseness, ribaldry, and sin,
How, Nathan, is it that their force can fail
Against the power of pothouse mirth and ale ?”

“Well, if theau’ll nobbut listen, lass, aw’ll try
I’ tothree words to show thee th’ rayson why.
For stuff ’at folk are o’ their lives amung,
It seldom happens th’ relish las’es lung.
When aw were sellin’ fleshmate, aw’d as lief,
Ha’ et a bit o’ wayter cress as beef ;

An', knockin' up an' down, one sometimes meets
Confectioners 'at's lost their taste for sweets.
It isno th' best as allus th' best con please,
Bu' what wi' th' whim o' th' palate th' best agrees.
Now, sin' we'n bin i' th' country, lass, it's true,
Theau's gan me moore religion than enou',
An' th' gill i' th' alehouse gi'es me th' same relief
As th' wayter cress when aw were sta'd wi' beef.
Excesses winnot do ; let's goo betwixt—
A bit for th' sowl an' bit for th' bally mixed,
Like th' grace afore an' th' grace at after mate.
Now theer's a sandwich any sowl could ate—
Two shives o' true religion, thin an' clean,
Wi' taters, mate, an' gill or two between."

"Don't scoff at sacred things ; no more I'll say,
But for your welfare be content to pray."

"That's it !" said Nathan, shifting in his chair ;
"Aw'd liefer ha' less praichin' an' moore prayer.
Bu' sithee, wench, it p'raps 'ud be as well,
When t' says them prayers, to say 'em to thyself'.
Aw've bin a trouble to thee sin' aw're wed,
An' aw'm afeart aw'st be so till aw'm dead.
Theau's tried my sowl wi' thy religion t' leaven,
An' t' fowld me like a letter meant for heaven.
Aw think, if t' could, theau'd th' postage pay as well ;
Bu' that, theau says, aw'm like to do mysel'.
Aw've tried, an' oft, for that my mind to fix,
Bu', like a stamp bout gum, it never sticks.
Thy sowl's bin gradely fledged to'art heaven to fly,
Like th' lark, 'at soars an' waarbles up i' th' sky ;

Bu', like a barn-bred chicken, fro' my birth
Aw've bin a brid 'at's fain to root i' th' earth.
Just let me be, an' then aw'st happen think,
For thinkin's th' on'y change aw've got bu' drink."

"In town you said the smoke and work oppressed,
And all you needed were fresh air and rest ;
Yet now you have them, free from business care,
You seem as little settled here as there.
No change from thought but drinking, Nathan? Fie!
If you've not change enough, what change have I?
Your time's your own, to wander where you choose,
To gossip round, and gather all the news."

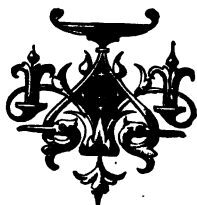
"Ay, th' news o' Notsmur isno far to seek,
An' spicy bits one yers i' th' coorse o' th' week.
Aw'll tell thee—though it's not i' print appeared—
Some interestin' news aw've lately heerd.
Aw'st not ha' patience t' tell thee all aw know,
Bu' gi' thee tothree scraps fro' Railway Row.
At number one a lodger's sto'en some fents,
At two an' three they're back'ard wi' their rents ;
At number four, that dandy Welshman owes
Owd Purkiss th' tailor for his Sunday clo'es ;
At number five they keep two howlin' dugs,
At six they'n just bin stovin' th' house for bugs ;
Th' owd chap at number seven's lost his job,
An Grimshaw's bowt his hens for fifteen bob ;
O' th' empty house next doore there's nothin' said ;
At nine it's thowt 'at th' couple ar'no wed ;
That dressy piece at ten, as duds so gay,
Allows her feyther t' live o' parish pay ;

Next doore they'n nowt bu' curtains, blinds, an' pole,
Bu' number twelve's just had two looad o' coal ;
Them folk at th' end wain't send their lads to schoo',
An' tother side—— Bu' p'r'aps theau's heerd enou'?"

"Yes, plenty of the sort," replied the dame.
"If true, 'tis rubbish, and if false, a shame."

"It matters nowt, wench, whether truth or lies ;
It's what th' folk han to tell, an has t' suffice.
There isno mich sensation i' their news,
Bur every little helps to keep off th' blues.
Aw've leant o'er th' station bridge till th' copin's wore,
My cuffs is threadbare, an' my elbows sore ;
Bu' that excitement's lung sin' gotten stale,
For th' folk are allus th' same as come by rail.
Aw seed one th' other day aw thowt were fresh—
A red-faced mon i' black, an' full i' flesh ;
Aw look'd which road he turn't, an' turn't an' a',
Becos aw thowt aw'd waatch him, wheer he'd ca',
Bu' fun', at after dodgin' him to Slagg's,
He're nobbut one o' th' chaps wi' chips i' bags.
Aw've bin at th' vestry meetin's prompt at eight,
An' allus raised a rumpus over th' rate ;
Aw've cheek'd o'er every 'cessment th' overseer ;
Bu' trates like them come nobbut once a year.
Wi' miles to tramp bout meetin' owt 'at's strange,
It taks a deal o' huntin' t' find a change ;
An', what wi' wind and patience lost i' th' race,
When th' game's run down it ill rewards for th' chase.
Aw've walked to Blextan, when they're mendin' th' street,
As blithe as lads to th' circus, for a treat ;

Aw've waatched them navvies wheelin' clinkers, stripped,
An' calkilated howm'ny ton were tipped ;
Aw've measured th' kerbs, an' counted th' channel stones,
An' strode out th' lenth i' yards o' th' streets an' lones ;
Aw've dodged'em round through every place they'n shored,
An' egged on th' owners t' badger th' local board ;
Aw've hulked i' th' smithy till my yead's gone dazed,
An' squat i' th' barber's till my seat's bin glazed ;
Aw've chewed a straw for hours t' help me t' think,
Till thowt an' thirst han druv me onto th' drink.
If t' grudges me th' variety, bespeak
Male porridge eight-an'-twenty times i' th' week,
An' when theau feels thy stomach turn within,
Then vary th' plates o' thick wi' bowls o' thin,
An' p'raps by th' week-end theau'll be able t' see
What pleasant changes th' country's got for me."





X.—DAME BARLOW'S TENANTS.

IN earlier days, when Nathan and his wife,
Well launched in trade, had fairly started life—
While he was sober, diligent, and strong,
And she was keenly frugal, both still young—
They thought it wise, and struggled hard, to lay
Aside provision for a future day,
And found, ere ten years' wedded life had passed,
That several hundred pounds had been amassed.
Then came ambition property to own ;
And, soon as Nathan's wish to buy was known,
Eager as beaux about well-proportioned belle,
Danced round him jobbers who had "lots" to sell.
But, much too wise in thoughtless haste to buy,
As long as sellers pressed him, he was shy ;
A cautious look he took before his leap,
And kept his cash till he could purchase cheap.
At length he bought five cottages, whose rent,
Fixed moderately, showed him eight per cent ;
And when with title parchments home he came,
A deed of gift he handed to his dame :
"See, that's for thee. Theau's help'd me t'gather th' brass
An' if so be misfortin comes to pass—

If trade were t' fail, theau knows, or aw were t' dee—
There'll be, at ony rate, a crust fo' thee.
As what's i' th' futur' nob'dy ne'er con tell,
Theau'd better start an' manage it thysel'.
Aw'st ax no questions, an' ha' nowt to say,
If t' bothers me for nowt, an' ma'es 'em pay.
Theau'll ha' thy rates an' taxes t' pay, an' th' chief ;
Pervide fo' thoose, or else theau'll come to grief.
Mak' th' tenants stump up th' rents, an' then, theau'll see,
Thy cottages'll keep theirsels an' thee."

She looked at him. His words alarmed her fears :
"Were he to die !"—her eyelids filled with tears.
She took his gift, she laid her hand on his,
Restrained a sob, and thanked him with a kiss.

Years rolled away, the Barlows' business throve ;
Their neighbours said a "roaring trade" they drove ;
And while from year to year their income grew,
Their wants remained comparatively few.
Their strength and will continuing, still they slaved,
And, frugal still and thrifty, still they saved,
Until the hoard was such that Harriet's mite
Had almost faded out of Nathan's sight.

But as she aged, her cottages became
A source of heart-contentment to the dame.
Their weekly yield kept well supplied the store
That oft sent want rejoicing from her door ;
To this her children, though enjoined to thrift,
With many a blessing, owed full many a gift ;
From this she many a liberal largess made,
The church, the schools, or charities to aid.

Still, from the country, every week she went
To town on Mondays to collect her rent ;
But once, prevented by an injured toe,
She asked her husband in her stead to go.

“Ay, lass,” said Nathan, “aw con try my hand ;
Bur if aw goo theau’ll ha’ my exes t’ stand ;
Aw’st nobbut charge thee th’ fare an’ five per cent,
Bur aw shall stop my exes out o’ th’ rent.”

“Oh, yes !” she laughed ; “of course I’ll pay your fare,
An’ e’en for your commission shall not care.
Indeed, I will not ten per cent deny,
If to be home for dinner you will try.”

“Agreed,” said Nathan. “Then theau’d better send
For tothery pound o’ mutton neck—th’ best end ;
An’ bake ine tothery taters under th’ mate ;—
Say hafe-past-one. Theau’ll see, aw’ll not be late.”

But Nathan—old, incorrigible sinner—
Despite his bargain, was not home for dinner ;
Nor was he there when, after waiting, she,
Her mind the worst foreboding, took her tea.
He came at length, but it was after eight,
And, as she feared, was in his usual state.

“Aw’ll tell thee what,” said Nathan, “it’ll pay
Thee th’ best to gi’ yon cottages away ;
If t’ keeps ’em long, it’s my belief theau’ll wear
Above thy rents for t’ keep ’em i’ repair ;
An’ as for th’ tenants, tak ’em round, theau’s got,
So wheer theau’s picked ’em up, a mangy lot.
They’re all on th’ growl, an’ thoose had th’ moost to say
I’ th’ grumblin’ line ’at hadno brass to pay.

If aw'd bin th' owner, aw were welly fit
To give a' th' bag o' tricks their notice to quit."

"How can you, Nathan, speak of people so?
I think them very fair, as tenants go.
But how much money have you brought for me?
If each one paid, you should have one pound three."

"Afore aw tell thee, p'raps aw'd better look,"
And Nathan from his pocket drew a book;
"Bur if theau'd own to th' truth, aw'll bet my hat,
Theau doesno get fro' yon lot th' hafe o' that.
Aw'd gotten th' names wrote ready, bu', by th' mass,
Theau'll ha' to tak' a duck-egg fo' thy brass;
Betwixt what th' tenants missed an' what aw've spent,
Aw'm three an' tenpence wo'se nor when aw went."

"Nathan, you are a most provoking man!"

"Now, howd thy neyse, an' lissen, if theau can,
An' then aw'll gi' thee th' full account o' th' lot—
Both what thy tenants said, an' what aw've got.
There's fost that little trotter mon, i' th' shop—
His stock i' trade were half a dozen o' pop,
An' five stale trotters on a dirty dish,
Wi' th' hawves o' two cowheels 'at stunk o' fish.
He ax'd me if aw thowt theau'd owt to lend—
He's short o' capital, he says, t' extend.
If fifteen shillin' he could nobbut raise,
He'd interduce chipped taters, fish, an' pays;
An' then, he thowt, a rattlin' trade he'd do,
If th' place were painted up an' papper'd through.
He'd lots o' money out, he said, bu' debt,
As things were gooin' now, were awk'ard t' get.

He paid two bob, an' tow'd me if theau'd wait
A week for th' other three, he'd set it straight.
Next doore there seem'd t' be nob'dy in, bu' when,
A while at after, aw were past again,
Aw thowt aw heerd 'em windin' up a clock,
An' knocked again, bu' nob'dy answered th' knock.
At th' house next doore to that, th' owd lady said
They're sleepin' wi' a cart sheet over th' bed ;
Some slates were loce, hoo thowt, an' aw were t' say,
Afore hoo seed thee, hoo objected t' pay.
An' then hoo started grumblin' over th' drain ;
It stinks 'em out, hoo reckon'd, when there's rain.
Then th' joiner's mother had a bill fro' th' son
O' six an' six, for time, an' stuff he'd fun'.
Hoo said theau'd ax'd him t' do thee some repairs
Hoo waanted done to th' banister an' stairs.
As that squared th' rent an' left her two bob due,
Aw straightened her wi' th' trotter merchant's two.
Then th' next an' th' last, theau knows, that Mrs. Peak—
As owed, theau said, a shillin' fro' last week—
Stopped eightpence for a knob hoo'd bowt for th' door,
An' th' rest, hoo said, o' this week were t' stand o'er ;
An' as hoo didno gi' me th' last week's bob,
Aw didno think it wo'th while bookin' th' knob.
Hoo tow'd me t' tak it whoam an' show it thee.
Aw've gett'n it i' my pocket wi' me—see !”

“Well, you're a pretty agent, to be sure !
Then all you've brought's the handle of a door ?”

“That's th' lot as aw've collected ; an' for th' job,
Aw'st want my fare an' five per cent on th' knob.”



XI.—AULD LANG SYNE.

THE green is thronged—it is subscribers' day—
And there is Nathan, flushed and warm with
play.

The western sky wears evening's roseate hue,
And humid grows the air with falling dew.
The winning "wood" has just left Nathan's hands,
And, poised awry, to watch it home he stands ;
He lifts the "footer," with success elate—
Then stands amazed, his eyes upon the gate.

There, round her face her apron for a hood,
The dame, with finger pointed towards him, stood,
A man of curious aspect at her side,
Who now, with puzzled look, the butcher eyed.
To Harriet's beck an answering sign he sent,
And hastened towards them, wondering while he went.
The stranger wore a wideawake felt hat,
His form was short, and innocent of fat ;
His face was time-worn, weather-browned, and lean,
And, save for red-grey goatbeard, shaven clean.
Adorned he was with watchchain, ring, and pin ;
His boots were made of alligator skin ;

A homespun suit of homely make he wore,
And in one hand a puce umbrella bore.
As Nathan's halting hand he warmly pressed,
He said, in sing-song accents of the West :

"I guess, old chum, this world has edged our wits
Since we went sliding on those Twenty Pits,
And wagged from school, by means of bogus note,
To get off bathing down by Jackson's Boat.
What ! don't you know me ? Bless the blooming fool !
Your red-haired pal at old Con Lynch's school !"

"It's Billy Dobson !" Nathan slapped his thigh ;
Then, with a laugh that bordered on a sigh,
The hand now wringing, said : " Bill—Billy, lad !
Aw'm glad to see thee—eh ! aw'm hearty glad !
Now, Harriet, bustle, wench ! Bill, come thy ways ;
Let's goo i' th' house an' crack o' th' early days !"

At home the stranger heard Dame Barlow say
That supper in the parlour she would lay,
And ask her husband what she should provide,
When, answering for Nathan, he replied :

"If you respect me for your husband's sake,
Don't ask me, please, a morsel more to take.
I've been at your old store, and your son Sam
Has packed me mortal tight with eggs and ham.
He'd heard his father speak, he said, of me,
And hauled me in to join them at their tea.
I guess that ham and eggs must first digest,
And ease the outward pressure on my vest—
Now hard upon my buttons, ma'am—before
This child can venture upon eating more.

But bet your life, Bill Dobson won't decline
A drink with Nathan there for auld lang syne."

"Theau'st have it, too, owd lad! Now stir about!
Let's ha' th' cigar box an' th' decanters out;—
Aw'm not i' tune for atin' mich mysel',
Let's ha' some boilin' wayter—cowd as well!
Tell Ann t' put th' kettle on this hangin' stand,
An' then we'st ha' th' hot wayter cloose at hand."

The two old chums, their wants supplied at last,
Now settled down to prattle o'er the past.
They talked of happy days that long had fled,
Of old friends married, and of old friends dead;
They talked of lanes green meadows winding through,
Where blackberries in early boyhood grew,
Where they for nests of wildbirds clambered trees,
Where wafts of hawthorn floated in the breeze,
Where cowslip bells the pastures richer made—
Now turned to busy streets by bustling trade;
They talked of changes changing times had brought,
And then of changes Time on them had wrought.

"Th' owd lad's a meddlin' an' a restless dog,"
Said Nathan gravely, as he sipped his grog;
"He's changed a ruck o' things, an' people too,
Sin' thee an' me, Bill, went to Lynch's schoo'."

"I guess he has," said Dobson, "Nathan, when
I think of what was Nathan Barlow then,
I see a little red-cheeked, chubby boy;
A seedy, seam-worn coat of corduroy;
A jacket sleeve that shines about the cuff;
A mop of hair, light brown, and mortal rough;

Two laughing lips, well primed with smart replies ;
Two dimpled cheeks, and pair of cheeky eyes.
I still can trace each boyish feature there,
Now time and weather battered ; but your hair,
Like melting snow the hillsides sliding down,
Has left you bare and shiny on the crown.
Nathan, old fellow, you look fat and well ;
But, notwithstanding that, your days do tell.
Your years are like your watchchain, and I think
Old Time has hall-marked you on every link."

"An' when," said Nathan, "aw look back at thee
I' th' schoo'-lad days, Bill, wha' dost think aw see?
Aw see a little white-faced, red-yured lad,
A nut as owd as feyther Abr'am's dad ;
Two e'en 'at never missed a pie, an' thumb
As ready as Jack Horner's t' cop a plum ;
A lad wi' patience t' wark or wait his ends,
Bur allus straight and jannock wi' his friends.
Bu' like owd granny's weel-thumbed Bible's page,
Thy chops are wore an' yallow'd now wi' age ;
An' though there's moore o' silver now nor red,
Theau'rt thicker still i' th' yure, aw see, nor th' yead.
It's true, owd Time's marked me, Bill, but aw see
His finger's none bin idle upo' thee."

"I guess he thinks he's used us middling fair.
He's left your beef because he took your hair,
And perhaps he calculates my hair atones
For nibbling all the tallow off my bones.
I calculate I must have tasty been,
The darned old rat has gnawed my bones so clean."

"What matters, if thou'rt well? It met be worse.
Aw'll bet thy ribs are leaner nor thy purse."

"Well—yes, friend Nathan—yes ; you bet on that.
I guess my wallet's fair-to-middling fat.
I've got a store of size, well stocked with wares,
A trifle in the funds, and mineral shares ;
And poorer men in Michigan I know
Than William Dobson, Nathan—not to blow.
You sail across and see me, with your mate,
And you shall share the fattest in that State."

"Nay, thank thee, Bill, we'st never raich thee theer ;
Bu' that's o' no account—theau'rt welcome here.
Aw'm glad theau's prospered, lad ; it's what aw thowt ;
Theau'd allus nouse to find thy road about.
Theau ne'er were built for t' do a lumberin' job,
Bu' theau's bin clear an' cute about thy nob."

"Well, certainly—I'll not deny that's true ;
But I've had awkward times to scramble through.
Hard work a game tarnation slow I found,
And floundered in it like a whale aground.
For some few years I could no headway make,
For I was on the 'help,' and had to take
Such jobs as I could get ; but all the while
I guess I shaved it close to get a pile ;
And you bet, Nathan, on the oil I struck
When I chucked work and started on the 'truck.'
But blow the business, dollar bags, and banks !
I'd rather talk about our school-day pranks.
I guess you've seen a peak against the sky,
When mists below it on the landscape lie—

Just like that peak one trick of yours I find
Crop up through misty mem'ries in my mind.
Don't you remember, Nathan, what a shine
There was at school about old Cón's new sign ?
Before the window rose a ladder tall,
And soon we heard a knocking on the wall,
When poor old Con, who smelt that day of rum,
Informed the scholars his new sign had come ;
And as, with pompous pride, he further told
That it was lettered in real leaf of gold,
The boys were on the fidgets to be free
That signboard new in real gold leaf to see.
When school was loosed, and all the lads about,
You raised a cry, 'He's left a full point out,'
And at that sign a lump of clay let fly
That missing full point promptly to supply.
Then little hands made little balls with speed,
And every scholar followed up your lead,
Until that sign with clay was dotted o'er
As thick as hobnails on an old church door."

"Begad, it were !" said Nathan, and he winked,
And then he laughed and chuckled till he chinked.

"I just can see that old boss looking through
That schoolroom sash, and shake his fist at you."

"'Twere o'er that full p'int aw fro' th' schoo' were sacked,
An' by my feyther geet my chops weel smacked ;
Bu' mony a time i' wo'se disgrace aw've bin
Through full pints of another mak, lad, sin.
Bu' talkin', Bill, o' peaks 'at show i' th' sky,
Aw've one consarnin' thee, lad, i' my eye.

Dost recollect that pup o' thine, ca'd Lyd,
An' th' lump o' steak we seed down th' cellar grid?"

"I guess I mind the pup, but cannot say
I call to mind that lump of steak to-day."

"One afternoon, i' gooin' whoam fro' schoo',
While aw were kneelin' down to lace my shoe,
An', as were usual, theau were on th' look out
For owt wo'th pickin' up as lay about,
A lump o' steak—p'raps hafe a pound, an' raw—
At th' bottom of a cellar grid theau saw.
'Eh, Nathan! sithee! This'll do for th' pup,'
Theau shouted; 'come, lad, we mun have it up!'
It wer'no lung till aw were at thy side,
An' mony a dodge to get at th' steak we tried.
We couldno raich it, couldno wriggle in;
We borrow'd tongs; we tried wi' streng an' pin;
Aw fetch'd a fork, an' tied it to a stick;
Bu' that were th' same—it wouldno manage th' trick,
For th' stick were short, an' th' gridhole deep—dost see?—
Bu' th' gridhole wer'no hafe as deep as thee.
Theau leant o'er th' grid a bit, an' scrat thy yead,
An' then geet up, an' wi' a wink theau said:
'Stop theer a bit, an' keep thy eye on th' grid,
While aw run whoam an' fetch a rope an' Lyd.'
Aw minded th' beef, to see it didno slope,
Till theau come runnin' back wi' th' dog an' rope.
Theau let th' pup down to th' beef wi' th' rope, an' then,
Wi' th' beef inside her, haul't her up again!"

"Well, Nathan—yes," said Dobson, "I confess—
That youthful dodge was middling smart, I guess.

The mountain to Mahomet wouldn't 'hook,'
And so Mahomet to the mount I took."

"Tak' a'together, Bill, aw think us two,
As weel as moost, han managed t' elbow through."

This Dobson owned, and then the old friends laughed,
And to "Lang Syne" another glass they quaffed.

"Now mix moore punch, an' fill thy pipe up, Bill ;
This neet, owd lad, theau'll ha' to drink thy fill."

"Well, Nathan, friend, if that's your game, I guess
And calculate that I shall do no less ;
And if my skin's elastic as your heart,
You bet, old pal, I'll make your liquors smart!"





XII.—THE NOSEBAG.

NEXT day, when Dobson woke with aching head,
Considerate Nathan stood beside his bed ;
Nor empty-handed came the host to ask
His guest what he desired, but brought a flask,
For this experience told him Bill would need,
And that he judged correctly Bill agreed.

“Nay, tak another pull ; it’s rattlin’ stuff.
It’s th’ same we had las’ neet. Hast had enough ?”

“I guess I have,” said Dobson, as he passed
The bottle back. “We went too blooming fast.
I don’t know, Nathan, how I got to bed,
But when you woke me up, you bet my head
Felt mortal like some mutton-skull that you—
You darned old butcher—just had cleft in two.”

“Well, whisky were my cleaver, an’ aw see,
So that thy grudge again’ th’ owd butcher be,
Fro’ th’ bottle now a hearty pull theau taks,
As if theau harboured no ill-will to th’ axe.”

“You bet I don’t. I guess that puts me right.
That old dog’s hair will heal that old dog’s bite.”

The suffering tippler takes, for present ease,
The draught that caused and will renew disease.

As they at breakfast sat, with faces red,
The butcher to his old acquaintance said :

“It’s forty yer, Bill, sin’ theau went, an’ more.
Did t’ never long to see th’ owd land afore?”

“You bet, friend Nathan, since I went away,
I’ve had that longing on me every day.
At first, I guess, I should have been too glad
To get back here if I the means had had ;
But when I started trade, and dollars piled,
To Yankeeland I grew more reconciled ;
And when I married, and had children three,
My youngsters’ home became a home to me.
To Michigan I went my lot to try,
There first struck oil, and there I hope to die ;
But bet, old chum, I’ve cherished all the while
The hope once more to see this dear old isle.
My wife is British born—one Charlotte Brear—
And when she sailed she left one brother here.
He died, but left behind him one son, Ned.
Ned married, had two daughters, and is dead ;
His widow since has followed him to heaven,
And their two daughters—ages nine and seven—
Were sent into the workhouse ; but I vow
They won’t remain long in that workhouse now.
Nathan, you bet, when next I cross the sea,
Those girls go back to Michigan with me.
As dollars only, dollars have no worth,
I calculate, but just their weight in earth.

It's only in the pleasure that it buys
The sterling value of the dollar lies ;
And setting up in life two orphans lost
Is worth, I guess, the dollars it will cost."

Now thrilled within Dame Barlow's tender breast,
Which Dobson's manners had not well impressed,
A sympathetic chord of pity true,
And in her eyes his features comely grew.

"Those Children are in Birmingham, and so
To-morrow I to Birmingham should go ;
To-day, when you are ready to go down,
I guess I'd like a ramble through the town."

"Aw'll put th' owd mare i' th' gig an' drive thee round.
Th' owd thing can cover yet a deal o' ground.
Hoo'll keep on th' move, lad, if hoo's broo's to climb,
Bu', same as growin' trees, hoo taks a time.
Hoo's bin a good un in her time, an' fast ;
Bu', poor owd lass, her gooin' days are past.
To back her now for runnin', wouldno pay,
But if hoo's lost her speed, lad, hoo con 'stay.'
If t' comes across a 'pub,' an' wants a drop,
Thee bet thy hat hoo'll ne'er object to stop.
Aw'll tak a nosebag, wi' some oats an' 'hay,
An' then for baitin' we'st ha' no delay."

First Nathan showed his coal-black short-horned cow,
Stalled next his mare, with empty udder now ;
He called her "Sootie," stroked her glossy hide,
And told the richness of her milk with pride.
A glance bestowed on poultry and on pig,
In haste they harnessed Maggie to the gig,

And, promising the dame not late to stay,
With roses in their coats, they drove away.

The sun was shining, and the morning dry,
Though vapours gathered in the western sky.
These overtook them ere they reached the town,
And overhead the welkin 'gan to frown.
They stopped—the clouds now bursting into rain—
At Platford's Inn, for shelter and a "drain."

"Theau recollects th' owd White House Gardens,
Eill?"

"I guess I do. Have you those gardens still?"

"Not we. Th' White House were cloose to wheer
we sit,

An' this is th' licensed house as used t' be it."

"Lord! what a difference! Nathan I can see
That old white tavern as it used to be—
A scene familiar to my eyes of yore—
A tilted cart and horsetrough near the door.
Back from the road, behind a field it lay,
Beside a stable, byre, and stack of hay.
I see a lot of hens and ducks in front;
I hear a sow amongst her litter grunt;
I see a kitten sport with wounded mouse,
A sleepy dog, and trees above the house;
And far along, each side this crowded street,
I picture grazing kine and ripening wheat."

Rain over, they drove onward, next to stop
To leave a message at Sam Barlow's shop.
Hearing the kerb-grazed wheel and Nathan's shout,
Sam and his wife and Jane came laughing out.

When he had said what he had called to say,
Then Nathan raised his whip to drive away ;
But Dobson laid one hand upon the rein,
And, lifting his forefinger, said to Jane
(In tone and manner seeming, as he spoke,
To be referring to some previous joke) :

“ Look here, my girl ! you say you’ll marry John ;
And look to me to pile the dollars on.”

But as the butcher jerked his rein to go,
Jane shook her head, and, giggling, answered “ No.”

At walking pace they drove conversing through
The great main streets, content outside to view
The public buildings, warehouses, and clubs,
But taking peeps inside of sundry “ pubs.”
Great were the changes met the stranger’s eyes,
And loud were his expressions of surprise.
Strange things he’d seen, and stranger things had learned,
When finally their heads they homeward turned.
They pulled up on the outskirts of the town,
And over “ twos ” of whisky settled down
To talk of places they that day had seen,
And of those places as they once had been ;
But naught he’d seen astonished Dobson more
Than Strangeways now and Strangeways as of yore.

“ Nathan, where those Assize Courts now I see,
I mind that ancient hall and old Big Tree ;
And when I saw them last, upon those lands
Where now that busy railway station stands,
There stood the Flying Horse, a wayside inn,
Round which in youth of wakes I’ve heard the din.

Beside that house I've seen big lumps of boys
Eat scalding porridge for a paltry prize,
And donkey races, jumping in the sack,
And such like, in that Patch Field at the back."

"Aw recollect; an' when aw think, to me
It welly seems as funny as to thee.
Th' owd church, too, sin' they started to 'restore,'
To me's none th' same as what it were afore.
They'n mended it wi' stone 'at's clean an' new,
An' though it's moore for lastin' now, it's true,
Aw allus think, whene'er aw'm passin' th' place,
It's like a sweep 'at's badly wesht his face,
Or same as th' beard o' some dark-faytured mon
'At age had started t' dab white patches on."

"But for those patches white, I guess that you
Have air-wash to 'restore' their natural hue."

"Ay; an' aw'll bet th' 'restorer' soon'll tell,
For th' air o' Manchester 'll soot em well."

"In all the distance, Nathan, we have ranged,
I guess the Irwell only is unchanged.

When I was young her lovely face was jet,
And her complexion is as inky yet.

I calculate that limpid river tells
A tale of credit to your city swells."

When day had dwindled down to twilight low,
They drained their glasses and got up to go;
But, finding Maggie still contented stood,
And that the liquor there was extra good,
The chums opined that, ere they took the rein,
They might indulge in "just another drain."

But Nathan, who, from past experience, knew
"Another drain" might mean "a drain or two,"
With forethought kind, was careful first to see
His ancient steed should fare as well as he.
With this intention, he went out and told
The lad who volunteered her head to hold,
To take the bit from Maggie's mouth with care,
And put the nosebag on the patient mare.
The bungling lad, not much to horses used,
In doing Nathan's bidding got confused,
And Maggie, finding bit and blinkers gone,
Shook off her timid groom and galloped on.
A moment only stood the lad to stare
In mute amazement at the bolting mare ;
The next, alarmed about results he grew,
And with the nosebag quickly bolted too.

The blinds are drawn within, the gas is lit ;
Unconscious of the "bolt" the cronies sit ;
The liquor drinks as mild as "Sootie's" milk,
The cushioned seats seem soft as downy silk ;
As warm they grow, each lays aside his hat,
And merrier and more cosy grows the chat,
Contrasting with the modern youth's fast ways
The simpler habits of their own young days.
As birdlime holds a captured magpie's feet,
Good liquor glues the gossip to his seat ;
And still they linger, only to perceive
To linger is to grow more loth to leave.

But dogging Time his nudging elbow plies,
Till he compels the laziest to rise ;

And so the laggards, yielding to his goad,
At length, reluctant, rose to take the road.
Now arm in arm they toddled to the door,
Where gig and Maggie stood two hours before,
And great was their bewilderment to find
That both had gone, and left no trace behind.
Where were the lad, the nosebag, gig, and mare?
None could inform them, no one seemed to care
First to the station to inform they went,
Wherein almost another hour was spent;
And then, when they began to think of bed,
To Nathan Barlow William Dobson said:

“I guess the best thing we can do, old swell,
Is take a cab and go to my hotel.”

“Hotel be hanged! As we’re too late for th’ train,
We’ll tak’ a cab, an’ goo to Sam’s again.”

They took a cab, but midnight struck before
The cab pulled up at Samuel Barlow’s door;
And both, on going in, were stunned to find
Dame Barlow there, and much distressed in mind.

“Thank God, you’re safe!” she cried, with clearing brow.
“Wherever, Nathan, have you been till now?”

“I’ mony a place; bu’ le’ me tell thee fust,
Booth gig an’ Maggie’s oather sto’en or lost.”

“The mare is safe; at Letford she was found,
Her blinkers off, and hanging to the ground.
When she was stopped, Uriah Wood was there,
Who, recognising both your gig and mare
(Poor Maggie’s hide, he said, quite frothed with foam),
Arranged her gear, and kindly brought her home.

I could not rest ; I sent two neighbours down
To search the road, and came by train to town ;
And Sam and Jane, with apprehension ill,
Set out to seek you, and are seeking still ;
For all our minds with anxious fears were filled,
Lest one or both were maimed, or even killed."

"Well, now, aw hope, thy mind's at aise again.
We're 'slew'd' a bit, bu' noather on us slain."

"Don't blow again your blooming mare can stay.
I guess she proved that she could go to-day ;
And good excuse had that old mare, it's true,
For Job himself would tire to stay for you."

"Wi' th' blinkers on, hoo're fain enough to stop,
Like chaps 'at wark by th' day or hour i' th' shop ;
Bu' bout, like jobbers warkin' th' profits t' fob,
Hoo went too fast, lad, gradely t' finish th' job.
Aw see it a' ; that nosebag were to blame."

"I guess that nosebag was a losing game."

"Theau'rt reet, lad ; an' fro' now till th' day aw dee,
Aw'll tak' a nosebag out no moore wi' me."

"Don't blame the mare or nosebag," said the dame ;
"The nasty drink is all you have to blame.
Remember what I've suffered from suspense,
And let your day's experience teach you sense."





XIIL—CHARITY.

ONE Saturday—for now he rarely rose
To quit the tavern till 'twas time to close—
Approaching midnight Nathan staggered home,
With face high-flushed and redolent of rum.
As waning daylight lingers in the sky,
So mirth subsiding hovers round the eye ;
And heartiest mirth in twinkles longest shows,
As brightest days in twilights longest close.
Now, in the smiles still dimpling o'er his face,
Past floods of merriment the dame could trace ;
The lingering humour showed the flow of fun,
As show wet sands how high the tide had run ;
And, as recurred her own lone hours of thought,
To her the contrast little comfort brought.

“I wonder, Nathan,” said she, “what you'd do
If I, as I am treated, treated you.
You let me here all night neglected sit,
While you at the hotel parade your wit.
If you're so merry, what have I, pray, done,
That I'm unworthy deemed to share your fun ?

“You can be pleasant everywhere but here.”

“Well, bu’, theau sees, I’ve better lis’ners theer.
Theer th’ moost o’ th’ folk as goo are fond o’ chaff,
An’ when owt funny’s said they allus laugh;
Bur if aw jest awhoam theau says aw scoff,
An’ when aw’m sayrious, then theau dozes off.”

“To spend your money there you must be mad,
If, as you say, the stuff they sell is bad,
While in your cellars ale and spirits lie
As good as man can make or money buy.”

“Bu’ then, theau sees, when th’ sperit’s good i’ th’ folks,
Wi’ th’ wo’st o’ drinks we’n sometimes th’ best o’ jokes.”

“But these hard times, ’twere more humane, I’m sure,
To give the money wasted to the poor.”

“We’n aich i’ th’ warks o’ mercy struck a line,
An’ feedin’ th’ hungry’s what theau’s chuz as thine.
Now my compassion leans to’art them as thirst,
An’ there’s a lot wi’ drouthy throttles cursed.
Wheer theau’s one chance o’ givin’ at thy door,
Aw’ve th’ chance i’ th’ alehouse to relieve a score.
So howm’ny’s ax’d, there’s hardly one says nay;
There’s twenty t’ sup for one as waants to pay.
There’s owd Ned Thacker, now—we’d him i’ th’ bar,
Though he’d a job, he said, for t’ get as far.
For poverty, owd Ned’s as poor as th’ worst,
An’ sore afflicted wi’ lung-standin’ thirst.
Now, that disaise is moore for draught nor pill,
An’ th’ littlest dose as aises Ned’s a gill;
An’, fear lest th’ physic loze th’ relievin’ power,
It waants repeatin’ twice at laste i’ th’ hour.

Aw've bin his doctor, lass, to-neet mysel',
An' my perscription suits uncommon well ;
For, notwithstandin' th' owd lad favvers t' fail,
He gets a deal o' comfort out o' ale.
He's ne'er bin mich for hurryin', as theau knows,
An' taks his time i' turnin' up his toes.
His inside's gone, he reckons, very near ;
He's bin bout liver welly twenty 'ear ;
He lost his reet lung turn't five 'ear ago—
At laste, th' Infirmary doctors tow'd him so ;
An' over eighteen month sin' th' herbal mon
Tow'd th' folk he lives wi' th' left an' a' were gone.
It licks me, missus, wheer he finds his 'west,'
Wi' hardly owt bu' gut an' throttle left !
When he were med, it seems to me as how
They built him as they builden vessels now—
I' wayter-tight compartments, as'll float
When th' say leaks in i' other parts o' th' boat.
Bout lungs an' liver common folk 'ud dee,
Bu' Thacker bout 'em 's pu'ed through mony a spree ;
An' aw believe, fro' what he's done afore,
He'll dee none till he's pu'ed through tothree more.
Ned's poor an' friendless, an', aw say 't wi' pride,
Aw've paid his billet sin' his sister died."

"Yes," said the dame, "you always have been prone
To waste your means on them that waste their own,
Whilst prudent poor, who practise frugal cares——"

"Need none o' my brass if they husband theirs."

"Nathan," she answered, "alms are self-disgraced
When they encourage spendthrifts in their waste ;

And greater wastrel, you yourself have said,
Than Edward Thacker never wanted bread.
His father left him money, and a trade,
Then long established, that had always paid ;
And when he married poor Amelia Hoare
He got with her two hundred pounds or more.
But then he took to drink, and did not stop,
Till he had spent their all, and lost his shop ;
And he was drunk and maudlin at her side
When poor Amelia and her infant died."

"Ay, lass, it's true he's been a slave to th' glass,
An' spent his feyther's savin's like an ass ;
Bu' Ned were weel to do when we were poor,
An' held his hand as oppen as his doore.
When fost aw started trade, i' Ned aw found
A ready friend as lent me twenty pound."

"Which you've repaid, I'm sure—if all were told
He's had from you—yes, nearly twenty-fold."

"Bu' then, theau sees, his brass wi' us has thruv,
An' th' moost o' what aw've gan him's bin for love.
While Ned's i' want, so what my pockets part,
Aw'st feel aw'm still his debtor i' my heart.
He's printed 'friendship' theer i' colours fast,
An', spite o' wear an' weshin', it'll last.
Till Nathan Barlow moulders back to th' dust,
Ned ne'er shall want a shelter or a crust.
Aw'd th' loan, an' never ax'd for, full two 'ear,
Although 'at Ned were wantin' it were clear."

"Oh, gratitude is proper—very true.
But when you paid him, what did Edward do?"

"He'd tothree week o' glory down at th' Bull,
An', till his purse were empty, he were full."

"Exactly so ; and as he used it then,
He'd use another twenty pounds again.
I cannot understand how you can think
It's charity to ply a sot with drink,
While in the neighbourhood deserving poor
The stint of nature's barest wants endure--
True, grateful hearts, that would requite your dole,
With prayers, if humble, fervent, for your soul.
'Tis scarcely, Nathan, right that vice should thrive,
While righteousness can hardly keep alive."

"If Paradise is proffered 'em for breath,
Your saintly folk gain nowt by dodgin' death.
It's nobbut sense, as fur as aw con see,
An' th' kindest thing i' th' world to let 'em dee.
It's chaps like Thacker, destined for owd Nick,
Moost need one's charity for t' keep 'em wick.
Nudged on to th' brink by lusts they cannot quell,
It's surely ruth to howd 'em back fro' hell."

"Do not imagine, Nathan, that I would
Let sinners starve to overfeed the good ;
But should we, Nathan, needy worth desert,
To pamper vice and folly to their hurt ?
To succour all a true compassion leads,
But each should meet the succour most he needs.
If truly Edward Thacker you'd befriend,
Teach him to think about his latter end."

"Ned's allus thowt a deal about that theer,
An's favver'd t' waant it i' some alehouse cheer."

"Nathan, for shame ! 'Tis not a theme for jest.
We are discoursing of a soul distressed.
Teach him the woes that are the drunkard's doom,
To fear the awful judgment yet to come.
Bid him of penitence and pardon think,
That hope and fears may wean him from the drink."

"Nay, lass, aw'st ha' to practise if aw praich,
An' those is doctrines yet above my raich.
Theau'd best try that thyself, wench ; bu', theau'll see,
Theau'll thrive wi' Ned no better nor wi' me.
Theau'll freet him from his beer wi' nowt o' t' sort ;
He'll brazen owt hereafter for a quart."

"Then is the drunkard of all hope bereft !
Poor wretched sot ! not one good point is left !"

"Well, if they hannot stopped lung wheer they'n bin,
His chops han letten mony a good pint in.
Theau needno look so shocked at what aw've said,
For aw've a fellow-feelin', lass, for Ned.
As long as th' owd lad's pipeclay throttle's theer,
He'd liefer dee nor live t' be bout his beer ;
An' see, if aw dee fost, so what yo say,
Aw'st leave him i' my will a quart a day.
Bu' stop thy clatter—hic—there's plenty said.
Aw'm gettin' th' hiccup ; let's—hic—goo to bed."





XIV.—SUNDAY : AT SERVICE.

THE same birds sing that sing on working days,
The same scene brightens in the same sun's
rays,

The same hens root and cackle o'er the farm,
Where chanticleer crows out the same alarm ;
The same geese, gabbling, waddle to the pond,
The same bold watchdog, barking, strains his bond,
The same tall trees their shifting shadows throw,
And brooks the same yet babble as they flow ;
The same bright tints the graver hues relieve,
And the same senses all these things perceive ;
Yet over all some spirit of repose
The lull ineffable of tranquil throws,
Some occult powers the day of peace reveal,
And all the advent of the Sabbath feel.

Oh, Sabbath morning, be thou ever blest !
Claimed by the Lord to give the weary rest !
The hireling drudge, that toils with throbbing brain
And aching bones his pittance small to gain,
Six days compelled, all seasons, forth to hie
In search of bread, this morn may longer lie.

The weak-lunged loom girl, haunted by the mill,
Whose fetid atmosphere is swift to kill,
Starts from her slumber, dreaming of the gong,
In apprehension that she's slept too long.
She thinks—'tis Sunday—"God be thanked!" she cries,
And down again with grateful heart she lies.
What florid prayers, what sounding hymns of praise,
That purseproud sloth from cushioned knees can raise,
Shall more a God of love and mercy please
Than earnest thanks from humble hearts like these?

Let not the just this blessing deem prepared
For them alone; it is by sinners shared,
And Nathan late was left abed to snore
Away his surfeit of the night before.
The dame, resolved that he should go to church,
Rose first, and straight his clothes began to search;
For 'twas her custom, at such times as these,
To stop the taps by seizing on the keys,
Lest he, on rising with a throat like chalk,
Should drink too deeply decently to walk.
Yet would her heart some small concession make
When Nathan pleaded that his head did ache;
One little cup she granted as a boon,
But sternly vetoed any more ere noon.
Though in the main the ruling will was his,
On Sabbath she was absolute in this.

Now, swung within the ancient steeple's walls,
The big old bell to church the people calls,
And presently, along the quiet ways,
More feet are heard than wont on working days.

The parish pedagogue, good Gideon Goole,
In double file to service leads the school.
The girls, all neat and primly dressed, go first,
With gilded hymnbooks, decorously nursed ;
Then come the boys, of whom the elder lead,
The youngest last, some trotting to keep speed.
Domestics follow, in their Sunday pride,
The newly-wedded barber and his bride ;
Then village tradesmen, with their buxom wives,
Whose rustling silks attest how business thrives ;
Farm labourers, smocked and fustianed all the year,
Save Sundays, now in Yorkshire cloth appear,
And long-plushed hats, in gloss as good as new,
Although in shape a decade old or two.
The local magnate—red-faced, fat, and grey—
With dame and daughters, drawn by dapple bay
In open phaeton, stopping at the gate,
Alight and enter church in semi-state.
The village blacksmith—o'er his anvil seen
Begrimed and stubble-chinned—now shaven clean,
His hard hands gloved, and wife and babe at back,
Now wends his way to service all in black.
Conspicuous, too, the pious crowd among,
As through the graveyard towards the porch they throng,
Is good Dame Barlow, holding Nathan's arm,
Less for support than keeping him from harm.
As Nathan enters, swollen-eyed and red,
In reverence or shame he bows his head,
And Harriet, following close on squeaking shoe,
Takes care to put him furthest in the pew.

The sunbeams, through the chancel's coloured pane,
Fall as with lustre hallowed o'er the fane ;
And, as from out the simple organ swells
The peal that pious hearts to prayer impels,
The rustic choir, untrained and rude of tongue,
Breathe forth an earnest strain of holy song.
As rugged surfaces, to friction brought,
To evenness and smoothness soon are wrought,
So voices rough, when they in praise ascend
In harmony, grow sweeter as they blend.

While good Dame Barlow's heart in fervour rose,
Her husband's eyelids seemed inclined to close.
She snatched his book, and, pointing out the place,
Returned it with a hint to pray for grace.
But now to prayer he could not kindly take ;
His trouble was to keep himself awake,
And, long ere service ended, he was sore
Where Harriet pinched when he began to snore.
When to the pulpit, though, the parson came,
For listening Nathan tried his mind to frame ;
But soon attention flagged, and many a look,
Behind his collar, at his watch he took.
Oft, when he thought the preacher would conclude,
He only coughed, and his discourse renewed.

The half-hour after noon the bells now chime,
To Nathan's mind suggesting " opening time,"
And, as the sermon yet to " sixthly " draws,
His solemn face grows longer in the jaws.
Oh, thou old worldling ! if 'tis given to scan,
By facial signs, the secret lusts of man,

Thy soul's less moved by holy thoughts sincere
Than is thy stomach by a thirst for beer.
For thee, no angel bearing cup of grace
Were half so welcome as a barmaid's face,
In worlds to come, no hopes of endless bliss
So tempting as a fresh-drawn pint in this !

But ceremonies, slowly as they wend,
At length, like all things earthly, have an end.
The sermon over, Nathan smoothed his hat,
And fidgeted as if on pins he sat ;
And when the final hymn was sung to heaven,
And holy benediction had been given,
He rose at once and nudged his wife to move,
Who failed not with a shocked look to reprove
His godless haste the holy place to quit,
With face far brighter than he entered it.

Outside, where friends and neighbours weekly meet,
Acquaintances came up the dame to greet ;
And, finding she had many things to say,
The thirsty Nathan slyly slipped away.
He turned not till he reached the tavern door ;
He entered, and soon found himself before
A pewter pint of extra Dublin stout,
Wherefrom a creamy foam was streaming out.
He took a long, deep draught, his lips he dried,
He smacked them, and with satisfaction sighed :

“ What's a poor sinner parched wi' thirst to do
As has t' sit dry-necked lis'nin' th' mornin' through?
Now, if aw'd nobbut had that pint i' th' seat,
That sarmon raly would ha' bin a treat.”



XV.—LIFE AND DEATH.

SEEDTIME to blossom, bloom to harvest led,
And season after season onward sped,
Year after year went slowly circling round,
And still the Barlows in the flesh were found.
But over them that live by Nature's laws
His withering finger Time more lightly draws,
And while with age he shrunk the butcher's frame,
He laid his hand more mildly on the dame.
A circle small around the smoke that curled
Above the homestead roof enclosed her world,
Her chief concerns that little sphere within,
Her husband and her children—all her kin.
Her garden was her joy in leisure hours,
Where protégés she raised in plants and flowers,
And in the cares bestowed to see them thrive
She found the health that kept herself alive.
More just than man, who, for the help that shields,
Too oft neglect and sometimes mischief yields,
Her grateful plants repaid with sweet perfume
The labours past that fostered them to bloom.

The old mare dead, the household pets were now
Her cat, canary, poultry, and her cow.
To tend them all her daily task she made,
And deemed her pains in their dumb trust repaid,
For all, with time, had grown to understand
Her friendly voice and court her fondling hand.
To busier minds she left the strife for fame ;
Her only pride was in a worthy name.
A melting heart, effused through mercy's hand,
Where felt, she thought, would gratefulness command ;
And her ambition sought but to secure
A niche in the remembrance of the poor.
While women's griefs evoked her tender tear,
To men's she listened with a dubious ear ;
When they approached to urge the piteous plea,
She doubted drink the secret want to be,
And proffered food, with laws for moral lives,
But alms in money only through their wives.
Those matrons poor who kept their persons clean,
And every Sabbath were at service seen,
Whose custom was with curtesy low to greet
Their betters when they met them in the street—
As many a village pauper soon could see—
To Harriet's heart and almsbox found the key.
'Twas just, she thought, and sweet moreo'er, to give
To them that through privation well could live.
Were all sincere ? What reck's, if she believed ?
The almoner was honoured, if deceived.

But Nathan's world, as sped the seasons fleet,
Contracted round his "Angel" parlour seat,

Where nightly now he toyed with traitors twin—
Enfeebling indolence and maudlin gin.
When first, but now and then, he used to go,
His flesh was ruddy with a healthy glow,
But when at length his daily visits grew
In frequency and in duration too,
His colour soon to grades of crimson rose,
The strongest tints converging on the nose.
So dawdled on his days till years had gone,
And Nathan's face grew wrinkled, lean, and wan,
And when his cheeks had lost their fiery hue,
His crimson nose had deadened down to blue.
But, while the flesh was wasting from his cheek,
The mind within was also waxing weak,
And though at times the jest he still essayed,
He bungled like a botcher at his trade.
Now in his mirth was no more humour true
Than "jolly nose" in his proboscis blue.
Sad, when a former favourite of the play
Outlasts the potent art that once could sway,
And haunts the footlights still—to play the fool !
Such now was Nathan in the "Angel" school.
The beast diseased and prostrate, rats may gnaw
The panther's erewhile lacerating claw,
And Nathan, once so forward fun to poke,
Was now the butt of many a heartless joke.

From shoulders bent his frosty head declined,
His breeches far to ample waxed behind ;
The numb-grown limb, by shambling gait betrayed,
A friendly stick or friendlier arm now stayed ;

Yet for his nightly glass, like swine to swill,
The old man tottered to the old haunt still,
No more with mirth the cheerful laugh to rouse,
But sip and drivel, then to sit and drowse.
As fuel makes the strong fire brighter blaze,
But chokes the low-burnt embers' feeble rays,
The cup that made his ardent fancy flash
Now only served to quench its smouldering ash.
But Time, who, on the stage strut o'er by men,
Shifts off the scenes, now changed the scene again.
That corner snug, where Nathan's form had been
Almost as much a fixture as the screen,
One night was tenantless—his lease had run,
And at the "Angel" Nathan's part was done.
The veteran toper, felled by palsied feet,
At length was forced to abdicate his seat.

Yet for a time, while summer's genial ray
Shed warmth and brilliance o'er the longer day,
Till autumn decked with golden sheaves the ground,
And winter's labours with the harvest crowned,
The thoughtful dame, in wheeled and sheltered chair,
Brought Nathan out to breathe the balmy air.
Nor lacked she help his trundle-couch to steer;
Some thirsty peasant always hovered near;
For she, 'twas known, though deaf to hints to "stand,"
Repaid such service with a liberal hand.
Thus, weather favouring, Nathan oft was seen,
His wife beside him, on the bowling green;
For there he loved with longing look to view
The game whose cunning once so well he knew.

And if, perforce, she dropped into the rear,
To hinder or to hide a struggling tear,
It eased her heart her own distress to trace
In pity glassed upon the peasant's face,
And, mindful of the silent solace, she
Neglected not to mark it in his fee.
But where of wick the snuff alone remains,
A lamp from oil no lasting light regains,
And Nathan's wasted vitals only won
A few faint flickers from the air and sun.

At length, when evening chilled and morn grew keen,
When cobwebs thick on shrub and hedge were seen,
When fogs and frost, encroaching through the night,
Were slow to flee before the tardier light,
Though winter's scouts yet shirked the midday sun,
The thread of Nathan Barlow's life was spun.
'Twas in October, while the lingering day
With fringe of gold edged Hesper's shadows grey,
That grouped in sorrow stood, with eyelids red,
Old Nathan's wife and children round his bed.
The parson, too, with serious face, was there,
To comfort the departing soul with prayer.
The dying butcher, propped with pillows piled,
Like Falstaff on his fingers, vaguely smiled ;
One skinny hand, as o'er the bed she hung,
To Harriet's dress-sleeve like an infant's clung ;
A few white hairs, like silken fabric frayed,
From underneath his nightcap thinly strayed ;
Through the dull eye, with filmy moisture glazed,
The mind, mistrustful of her medium, gazed ;

Crimpled like fading fruit, and hanging wide,
The lips in mumbling speech were drawn aside.
His thoughts confused—from the disjointed sense
Of what he muttered—seemed to wander thence ;
Nor strayed they towards the realms of light above,
But through the scenes in life he used to love.
The parson, shocked, essayed to lure them back,
And fix them on the upward, heavenward track ;
But Nathan only stared with vacant grin,
And mumbled on of Masons and the inn.
Now on his lips the priest his finger laid,
And all knelt down to listen while he prayed.
When Nathan heard the pious pastor say—
“ Vouchsafe thy erring servant’s works to weigh,
Not strictly by the weight of faith he owes,
But rather by the little that he knows,”
For Harriet’s ear he signed with gesture sly,
And towards the voice inclined a sightless eye.
“ And if unfavouring still the balance seem,”
The prayer went on, “ O, turn the wavering beam
With Thy compassion. Flesh, alas ! is frail—— ”
“ Just pop that bit o’ reasty fat i’ th’ scale,”
Said Nathan faintly ; then he turned in bed—
A stretch, a gasp, a rattle—he was dead.





XVI.—NATHAN'S SHADE.



WHEN Nathan lay, beneath a grass-clad mound,
In triple coffin, deep below the ground,
His grieving widow learned that by his will
Of all his wealth he left her mistress still.
Executrix, by no conditions tied,
It touched her heart and gratified her pride
To find her faith, relied on through the past,
Confided in unquestioned to the last.
Though often, in the "mingled web" of life,
Love's fairer hues are chequered o'er with strife,
Companionships of more than forty years
Are sundered not without regretful tears.
From Harriet's mind, her wayward partner dead,
Resentment of his later failings fled,
And 'twas her sole, sweet solace now to praise
The manlier nature of his younger days.
To her regrets his character appeared
Like wholesome fruit that had been surface-seared,
As in her garden peas she sometimes found,
In mildew'd husks, which yet at heart were sound.

His faults 'twas Mercy's priv'lege to condone,
To keep alive his better traits her own ;
And she resolved to raise, whate'er she spent,
Above his dust a noble monument.
She would, she thought, some pious friend invite
A brief, becoming epitaph to write,
Which o'er his bones his children and their seed,
In granite hard or marble white, should read.
The dame besought her sculptor and her friend
Their taste and judgment in a sketch to blend ;
And ere another week had passed away
Their efforts joint before the widow lay.
The monument itself the dame admired,
In beauty it was all that she desired ;
But when the epitaph she came to read,
Thereat her wonderment was great indeed.
The pious friend, who never Nathan knew,
The butcher's virtues somewhat overdrew.
Much from the widow of his worth he heard,
Of faults, or even foibles, not a word ;
And, guided by the worth her praise expressed,
At worth yet more exalted he had guessed.
Suffice that he—though we forbear to quote—
A list so long of moral virtues wrote,
That well a saint in embryo might be proud
For Nathan's epitaph to wear his shroud.
A second time she eyed the long array,
Then ventured, though but timidly, to say :
 “My husband had some little failings, though,
Which they who read the epitaph will know.”

"So have we all," exclaimed the friend, annoyed,
For Harriet's hesitation piqued his pride.
"*Nil nisi bonum*—so the ancients said,
And charity still echoes—of the dead.
Mercy shall blush when o'er nice truth begins
On dead's men's monuments to flout their sins.
Let future times your husband's virtues con
When those who knew his faults to rest are gone."

Poor Widow Barlow, fearful to offend,
By criticism, her obliging friend,
Assenting meekly to his dictum, sighed,
Though in her heart she was not satisfied.
She wondered—"O, that only half were true!"—
What Nathan would think of it if he knew.
Oppressed with doubt the dame retired at night,
But dreamt a dream that put her doubts to flight.

She saw the churchyard where her husband lay,
Bathed in the beauty pale of Cynthia's ray,
Where ranks erect of monumental stones
Cast slanting shadows over neighbouring bones ;
And high among them, wrought in marble brave,
The widow's tribute rose o'er Nathan's grave.
Anon, she thought, the ground began to quake,
Her costly monument to reel and shake ;
Then from the grave, before her wondering eyes,
A weird and fog-like shadow seemed to rise,
And, issuing from its slow-dissolving gloom,
The shade of Nathan stood beside his tomb.
The spectre's pose displayed the jaunty air
Which he, when fresh, was wont in health to wear ;

And on his features sat the mocking look
Which when he lived she oft found ill to brook.
As on the epitaph his eyes he turned,
And there his own undreamt-of virtues learned,
His sides with inward laughter seemed to shake,
And thus at length the chuckling spectre spake :
 “ I’ life hoo’re allus pratin’ o’ my sin,
Bu’ now aw’m dead hoo’s fun’ how good aw’ve bin.
It’s none so lonesome here.” (He looks around.)
 “ By th’ look o’ th’ stones we’re pratty thick i’ th’ ground ;
An’ now aw’m up, aw think aw’ll tak a spin
An’ see what mak o’ company aw’m in.
Let’s look at th’ epitaphs, an’ then aw’s’t see
Howm’ny there is as virtuous as me.
There’s one lies theer wi’ glory round his nob
Forgot to pay me five-an’-twenty bob ;
An’ here’s another Christian i’ my debt—
A pious sowl as ever welshed a bet.
There’s tothree moore o’ th’ righteous, too, aw see,
Saint Peter wain’t know hafe as weel as me,
If th’ epitaphs for characters he taks,
An’ doesno mony awk’ard questions ax.
Wi’ th’ same good stick we seem t’ be tarred a’ round ;
So how we’n lived, we’re good i’ th’ buryin’ ground.
Eh ! here’s th’ owd cottage jobber, Abel Pugh,
As cadged i’ th’ church an’ tow’t i’ th’ Sunday schoo’.
He mended roofs, an’ bowt owd slates an’ bricks.
They’n not tow’d hafe thy sanctimonious tricks.
Good, honest sowl ! chuz how thy gravestone cracks,
Theau pinched a’ th’ flashin’ off my chimbley stacks.

For th' dead a' th' world a gush o' praise con spare,
Bu' few 'at's livin' get their gradely share.
When th' chap at th' porkshop bowt th' owd Angel sign—
A bargain, too, i' th' advertisin' line—
To fix at th' gable end, owd Peter Wrigg
O'er th' angel painted th' pictur' of a pig.
I' th' ways o' th' livin' world, now, that's a trick
'At folk like t' play wi' th' characters o' th' wick.
Bu' th' next as buys th' owd sign, wi' dabs o' paint,
Mayhap o'er th' pig'll farcify a saint.
That's th' way 'at's done wi' th' dead, an' th' way, aw see,
Poor simple-hearted Harriet's 'done wi' me.
Bur aw mum have it off; aw'st never rest
Wi' sich a heap o' humbug on my chest."

He plucked a tuft of grass, and rubbed the stone,
Which bright as opal in the moonlight shone,
And, leaving on the slab a surface grey,
His saintly epitaph he swept away.

"Let's show her how my character to tell
An' hint a hope 'at aw may rest as well."

He thumbed his left-hand knuckles, as to see
Which digit for his purpose best would be;
He broke the index finger at the joint,
Against a footstone rubbed it to a point,
And, thus prepared and tapered, with the bone,
As if with chalk, he wrote upon the stone:

Let thirsty Christians tak a timely tip,
An' taper off their "lotion," warned by me.
Died 10th October, eighteen eighty-three,
Aged sixty-seven, NATHAN BARLOW—R. I. P.

“ Well, now to rest aw’ll have another try.
Aw’ve tow’d ’em th’ truth ; let’s see if aw con lie.
That theer’s a privilege as comes wi’ dyin’,
For th’ dead con do no mischief wi’ their lyin’.”

As Nathan’s spectre sank into the ground,
The widow woke affrighted, and looked round,
And, finding that she lay at home in bed,
She judg’d her dream a mandate from the dead.
’Twas thus it came to pass that Nathan lies
Beneath a monument of modest size ;
And all his neat but simple tablet says
(Beyond the date, his name, and length of days)
Is—and with truth the brief memorial ends—
That Nathan died “ lamented by his friends.”



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